

- Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu, Bram Cleys, Els De Palmenaer

Searching for origin between Belgian archives and Congolese oral sources: the case of the power statue of Chief Nkolomonyi at MAS | Museum aan de Stroom in Antwerp

The article examines the case of the nkishi (or power statue) of Chief Nkolomonyi of the Songo Meno people, currently housed at the MAS | Museum aan de Stroom in Antwerp. The authors lead a research project on the colonial history of the Museum's Congolese collections, with the nkishi being a compelling case study. Acquired by merchant Paul Osterrieth in 1923, during the period of Belgian colonial rule, the nkishi arrived in Antwerp in 1939 following Osterrieth's death. The authors worked on archival documents and interviewed members of the Indanga community from Nkolomonyi's village, reconstructing the collective memory surrounding this artifact. The article underscores the challenges faced in provenance research on sensitive cultural objects in Western museums.

Keywords: Research on provenance, D. R. Congo, restitution, oral history, museum ethics

- Maria Pia Guermandi

Between new regulations and old challenges

The 2018 Sarr-Savoy report promoted a political context favorable to the development of laws and directives by European countries. Some countries – e.g. France, Belgium – are finally tackling the restitution of their colonial heritage by modifying the national legal framework. Although these examples are still linked, in many ways, to a Eurocentric vision, they correct an international legal system that, until a few years ago, was insufficient, encouraging the current spread of repatriation initiatives.

Keywords: Legislation, bilateral agreements, restorative justice, UNESCO, UNIDROIT

- Ambra Cascone

Opacity and Misery of the Italian Colonial Museum: Notes on Its Wartime Reopening

This contribution critically reexamines studies and archival sources to analyze the complex history of the Colonial Museum of Rome during its reopening phase after World War II, with particular emphasis on the delicate context of international claims and negotiations regarding the restitution of artworks and objects from former colonies.

Keywords: Colonial Museum of Rome, colonialism, post-war period, museology, restitution of artworks

- Jos van Beurden and Alula Pankhurst

Ethiopia's Peculiar Position in the Discourse about Colonial Collections and the Changing History of Restitution Initiatives

Before discussing the history of restitution to Ethiopia and the role of Ethiopia's government and civil society, this paper outlines what makes the case of Ethiopia particular: the country that was never colonised but experienced the impact of European expansionism. It then discusses the two principal periods of looting: in the XIX century by Britain's raid in 1868 and in the XX century during the Italian Fascist occupation from 1936-41. In each case it reviews the history, phases, changing types and processes of restitutions, the actors involved and where the artefacts have since been kept, focusing not only on looted items in European public collections but also with private collectors and the art trade. The paper is a collaboration of one author in Ethiopia and the other in Europe taking a multidisciplinary perspective.

Keywords: Colonial root, restitution, Africa, Magdala, Mussolini

- Philip A. Olayoku and Ehinon E. Arikhan

Beyond Restitution: Democratising Cultural Access and Protecting Indigenous Ownership Within the Shadow of Benin's Looted Bronzes

This study draws from the historicity of looted Benin artefacts to argue for an indigenous-led democratisation of access and the protection of ownership by situating the arguments on cultural justice within the debates of equality and equity. It bases this contention on the Benin principle of justice, "Ibuohien oghẹ ẹmwanta", which draws from the practical conception of truth as lived communal experiences. The study concludes by advocating for ethical reorientation, prioritisation of indigenous voices, collaboration and digital democratisation of access as modes of ensuring justice beyond restitution.

Keywords: Colonial restitution, cultural justice, Benin bronzes, indigenous ownership

- Vera-Simone Schulz

From the Global Renaissance to «New Relational Ethics»: Early Modern African Artifacts in European Museums and Matters of Restitution

This article focuses on issues related to restitution, yet not with regard to objects from Africa that arrived during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but with regard to an early modern group of artifacts. Interrogating case studies of ivory carvings from Sierra Leone that have been created in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century and collected in European Kunstkammer collections since then, the article challenges the restitution concept arguing for a need to reconsider also the role of such objects for restitution discourses, both on material and epistemic levels.

Keywords: Transcultural art history, global Renaissance, African art, European museums, restitution

- Marcel Ngandu Mutombo

Restoration of the African Cultural Matrix: Working Paths Based on Traditional Congolese Sculpture

The objects looted and returned to Africa are material references that anchor the continent's memory, history and cultures, helping to correct the racist thoughts of XIX century philosophers and thinkers. For example, the precious female sculptures of the Tshibola cult are characterized by scarifications and signs that are highly symbolic, as they assign status and nobility to women. However, this value is now disavowed by the Congolese, due to the work of demonization of material cultures practiced by missionaries and now by the Pentecostal churches. These returned objects offer Africans the opportunity to correct prejudices and racist assumptions, but in order to do so, a solid strategy to preserve them has to be elaborated.

Keywords: Restitution, scarifications, Tshibola cult, African women, culture

- Itala Vivan

The Bloodied Benin Bronzes: A Vanguard of Decolonial Restitution

The Benin Bronzes, hitherto a symbol of exotic beauty in art, have now become an emblem of historical colonial plunder and on-going violence through museum exhibitions. The article describes how their diaspora occurred and what their emblematic value is, after a colonial history of robbery and violence whose end is today called for through a repatriation that means decolonial restitution. The article traces the debate that followed the various requests for restitution, which began

immediately after Nigeria's independence, in particular the negative responses based on the concept of Universal Museums.

Keywords: Benin Bronzes, restitution, British Museum, Pitt Rivers Museum, Museum of West African Art

- Valentina Lusini

A Shared Heritage? Account of a Visit to the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren

This article presents the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren, Belgium, founded as the Musée du Congo. The museum, one of the most important in the world on Central Africa, has recently been renovated with the goal of foregrounding the reconstruction of the main phases of the musealization of ethnographic collections from colonial contexts. Critically reflecting on the museum's conceptual narrative, the article highlights the complex relationships between social and colonial history. Even though the AfricaMuseum's mission of public engagement has progressed greatly since its founding in 1898, it still retains traces of its colonial past, a theme constantly raised by activists increasingly advocating the need for cultural institutions to respond to urgent and contested issues, such as white supremacy, postcolonial and neocolonial structures of power and repatriation of looted properties.

Keywords: Museums, heritage, decolonization, Belgium, Africa

- Gaia Delpino, Rosa Anna Di Lella, Matteo Lucchetti

Two Paintings from the Ethiopian Parliament in the Collections of the Former Colonial Museum: Notes on a Restitution That Has (Yet) to Occur

Among the Museum of Civilizations' collections are two paintings that once belonged to the Ethiopian Parliament in Addis Ababa. The canvases were war trophies looted by the Italians and long displayed in the former Colonial Museum of Rome to convey celebratory narratives. Starting with the case study of the discovery of these artworks, the article illustrates a process of analysis and practices implemented in the present-day museum in relation to such a sensitive collection.

Keywords: Sensitive collections, colonialism, restitution, reparation

- Véronique Clette-Gakuba and David Jamar

The Paths of Restitution Activism in Belgium

Before the 2022 Belgian law on colonial restitution, a decade of activism had already pushed the concept of "restitution" beyond the simple return of looted objects. Activists, guided by the goal of active inheritance and working together on proposals to return those object, sought a more profound approach. This article explores how Afro-descendant artists and activists, especially in critiques of the Tervuren Museum, reshaped the idea of restitution. Instead of viewing returned objects as mere commodities, activists focused on the history of these items, from their colonial appropriation to their exhibition and transformation into "property to be returned." Questions such as "What did these artifacts endure?" highlight the damage caused by their removal, seeing them as remnants of destroyed worlds. In this view, restitution becomes a process of addressing ongoing racial violence and the necropolitical order, rather than just returning objects.

Keywords: Restitution, necropolitics, ecology, activism, diaspora

- Lies Busselen

Hidden Colonial Legacies and Pathways of Repair

This article investigates how the question of ancestral remains out of colonial contexts in Belgian museum collections is understood in the DR Congo. This article introduces new reflections on more than 20 conversations with Congolese academia, politicians and museum professionals, originally

organized within the federal Belgian project “Human Origins Multidisciplinary Evaluation” project in February and March 2022 in Kinshasa. Based on participatory action research (PAR) it proposes tools towards informed and supported decision-making and equal-to-equal dialogue to face future challenges of repair.

Keywords: Colonial collections, ancestral remains, restitution and repair, decolonial challenges

- David Mbutia and Purity Kiura

Deciphering the Current Geopolitical Trends in the Restitution Movement: A Case Study of Kenya

The article explores the trends that have played out in covert and overt efforts that have been applied in apportioning or claiming the rights to determine the canons of ethics, methodologies, standards and procedures that should be used in carrying out restitution, with a focus on Kenya. The central theme in the study is “By whose rules and standards is restitution movement playing out? And what are its expected social, cultural, economic and political achievements?”

Keywords: Restitution, expropriation, Kenya, geopolitical, cultural objects

- Caterina Pecchioli and Enrica Picarelli

Decolonizing the Gaze: The Colonial Heritage of Italian and International Fashion Design and its Impact on the Collective Imagination

“Decolonizing the Gaze” is an artistic project launched by Italian visual artist Caterina Pecchioli in 2022 with the goal of exploring the link between identity, fashion and colonialism. The project takes place in Italy and the Netherlands and involves several institutions from Africa, Europe and North America, as well as fashion creatives with origins in countries with a colonial history. Through the analysis of the formal and aesthetic characteristics of fashion items stored at Museo delle Civiltà Rome, and Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, the participants discussed the traces of colonialism often lost in the fashion narrative, developing alternative readings of their histories and legacy in the present.

Keywords: Decolonial fashion, Italian colonialism, made in Italy, Vlisco, fascist fashion in Italy, Vlisco, fascist fashion

- Ariella Aïsha Azoulay and Lotte Arndt

Unlearning Heritage (translated by Lucrezia Cippitelli)

This interview offers essential insights into Ariella A. Azoulay’s radical critique of imperialism in her books *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008), *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019), and the recently-published *La Résistance des bijoux* (2023). The scholar, whose works focus predominantly on visual and material culture, proposes a path to resist and dismantle imperialist violence through onto-epistemic “unlearning”. Azoulay describes imperialism’s epistemic violence that separates people and the objects representative of their cultures by creating institutions that legitimize extraction and the classification of peoples into citizens and non-citizens. Resistance to imperialist dispossession includes rejecting that separation and the categories of knowledge it invents, in favor of alternative approaches that cultivate organic and shared relationships between people and the environments they create.

Keywords: Imperialism, extraction, museums, sans-papier, epistemology of violence