Nelson Adebo Abiti

The Uganda Museum's Tribal Representation: Colonial Repositories and Community Reconciliation in Uganda

DCNtR Debate #3. The Post/Colonial Museum

Introduction

Colonial rule in Uganda introduced classifications of so-called ›tribal‹ groups to enforce British administrative units. The idea or imagination of the ›imperial‹ implemented by the British colonial government included exhibitions of ›tribal crafts‹ in the Uganda Museum. While such exhibitions and displays divided the population into ›tribes‹ for the convenience of the British, the protectorate government ordered its colonial officials to embark on the project of ›civilising society‹. The establishment of the Uganda Museum, therefore, should be understood as part of the process by which British protectorate rule was enforced; the museum was, in this sense, an institution of the colonial government structure (Peterson 2015: 5).

The imperial policy of indirect rule in Uganda was an instrument of dividing people into ›tribal‹ people (Mamdani 2018). Similarly, the foundation of the protectorate museum in Uganda from 1908 until the 1960s had served the problematic ethnographic project of the British colonial administration. It cannot be separated from the deliberative strategies to undermine the knowledge and the organization of native societies in Uganda. From my personal experience of encountering the ethnographic collections labelled as fetishes and charms on display in the Uganda National Museum, I was faced with the challenge of redressing colonial injustice.[1] But the underlying histories of protectorate rule at the Uganda Museum had infused the way the ethnographic artefacts were labelled with colonial classifications and the

enactment of ›tribal‹ and ethnic differences.

The problematic task of displaying ethnic groups remained a challenge during the postcolonial period for the independent nation of Uganda. The idea of folkloric cultural competitiveness was promoted in the 1960s as Pan-Africanism. In 1983, Omare Konaré noted that African ethnographic museums provided ratification for Western audiences to consume African exoticism (Konare´1983: 146). This said, indigenous knowledge practices survived among the members of the various communities in independent Uganda, though the material cultural representation in, and through, the museum clung to a narrative disconnected from historical and contemporary social practice. As such, the reappearance of indigenous knowledge as a form of alternative cultural practice became a force of opposition against colonial epistemic violence.

In the recent report by Felwine Sarr and Beńedicte Savoy (2018), *Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Towards a Relational Ethics*, the argument is made that the return of African Art objects to West African countries alone cannot fix the problems of colonial injustice. The scholarly debate on matters of restitution here focuses on rebuilding relations and engaging in rehumanizing them (Rassool 2015: 669; Sarr/Savoy 2018). Engaging with the knowledge practices that shape the museum (cf. Hicks 2020) would also entail putting the concept of the modern nation as an element of colonial ideology to the test, as it was established along the political, institutional and anthropological politics of representing ›tribal‹ people in Africa (Coombes 1994: 2). Therefore, restitution, decolonization and nation state formation must be addressed by re-evaluating violence against societies that have experienced land displacement, brutal killings and the looting of cultural objects, all of which have caused unresolved painful memories and injustice.

Yet, for too long, the representation of ›tribal‹ artefacts in the ethnographic galleries has remained immune to the disrupted intangible memories among young people in conflict situations. But it is precisely the loss of intangible memory that poses the

risk of behavioural problems emerging from hopelessness and resulting in violence. Recently, indigenous knowledge has gained new grounds in memory practices of the community and has reawakened the need for reinterpreting and redefining the meaning of ethnographic artefacts. From the lessons learned during the encounter with ethnographic artefacts in the museum and from engaging with forms of social memory among the communities from which these artefacts originate, it has become apparent that it is precisely the question of restitution and decolonisation that has reconnected and reactivated the local knowledge of the artefacts and their immaterial significance and meaning.

Against this background, a collaborative community project in Northern Uganda was initiated to preserve the memorial landscape. It aimed at amplifying the elders' desire of restoring their cultural heritage in the aftermath of the civil war that had occurred between 1986 and 2006. After the cessation of hostilities between the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) and the government soldiers (Jahn/Wilhelm-Solomon 2015: 186f.), the community memorial practice was reviving the cultural practice initiated by the elders of the Acholi rituals processes of forgiveness and reburials. In a contested argument about the make-up of contemporary society, this project was geared towards a postcolonial reconstruction of social sensibility and aimed to help to reposition the moral authority of elders. The attempt to rethink the reconciliatory project of rebuilding society in Northern Uganda after the civil war entailed rethinking the ethnographic museum (Abiti 2018: 83). How could the colonially founded museum – with its ethnographic framing that has become the Uganda National Museum – reposition itself towards social healing in this post-conflict situation, while it continues to carry the burden of misinterpreting and misrepresenting cultural knowledge in Uganda? It is important to understand how the British colonial administration began to document ethnic societies and in doing so formed the nation of Uganda. Alongside the project of nation formation, the protectorate government promoted the colonial ›museum‹ project that emphasised and endorsed differences between communities in Uganda.

The Role of the British Protectorate in the Uganda Museum

The British government introduced an indirect rule policy to administer Uganda in 1894. Captain Frederick Lugard had coded the indirect rule policy in which the native societies were divided into ›tribes‹. Although Lugard did not govern Uganda for long, his approaches were incorporated as a form of effective imperial science in the East African protectorate of Uganda. The concept of ›tribal‹ structures was implemented administratively in Uganda by Henry Hamilton Johnston (also named Sir Harry Johnston) between 1899 and 1901.[2] When Hamilton Johnston was appointed as a special commissioner for the colonial protectorate government of the British in Uganda, he embarked on a survey and demarcated the country into ›tribal‹ provinces. Hamilton Johnston ensured that colonial rule administered the ›tribal‹ provinces as separated places and peoples. In the process of enforcing imperial rule, the formulation of the protectorate Museum was initiated to further the description of ›tribal‹ people as a basis of the modern nation state of Uganda. The colonial museum began as a project of collecting ethnographic artefacts (Uganda Protectorate 1939: 5, see Deming 1966: 2). The involvement of colonial administrators in the ethnographic work testifies to the discipline being designed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to expand the imperial science of conquest.

The discipline of anthropology was developed in the nineteenth century. But it later became a category in its own right in terms of the way objects were collected and gathered as material culture in a modern museum. The anthropological museum was designated to implement and display the anthropological system of knowing the uncivilised society (Harris/O'Hanlon 2013: 8). When the discipline of anthropology became more pronounced in the early twentieth century, however, the ethnographic objectives of collecting, classifying and representing began to organize the work of anthropology as a field practice (Lidchi 1997: 161; cf. Clifford 1988: 25). Henrietta Lidchi (1997: 160) referred to ethnography as a discipline of human science that dealt with racism, primitiveness and exotic objects. Moreover, ethnography was

considered a study of unknown societies by documenting their ways of life, behaviours, beliefs and artefacts from people's homes and places of worship as reference materials (Reeves/Kuper/Hodges 2008: 512). The language and the meaning of ethnography was designed in Europe. Ethnography was therefore a cultural practice of colonialism through which field activity, and the time spent for research, would qualify for working in a colonial state. Tony Bennett (1995: 4f.) pointed out that the beginning of the transformation of the modern public museum is part and parcel of an ethnographic way of knowing ›uncivilised‹ societies in order to govern them. As such, the ethnographic museum is, in its origins, a colonial museum. If African museums were defined as ethnographic, it is important to lay bare the relationship of colonial structures on the one hand, and the use of the museum as an institution to train young colonial officers to have them administer effective processes of undermining native authorities on the other. In Eastern Africa, where the question of ethnography has been entangled with the ongoing politics of tribalizing, ethnicizing and traditionalizing this subject to colonial rule, the ongoing relevance of ethnographic museums has come under examination.

Consequently, the Uganda Museum was founded immediately under the British protectorate government in 1908 by Sir Henry Hesketh Bell (see Uganda Protectorate 1939: 5). The museum was also the oldest colonially established cultural institution in the East African region (Peterson 2015; Posnansky 1963). During the implementation of the 1900 Buganda agreement, the deputy commissioner of the British protectorate government Sir George William wrote in a letter:

> »I am directed to inform you that his excellency the Governor has made arrangements for the opening in Entebbe of a Protectorate Museum, for the collection of local curios of all descriptions, such as articles of interest and specimen of native weapons and manufactures, and local products, vegetable and mineral: in fact of all articles of historical, ethnological and

local industries of interest« (Wilson 1908).[3]

Wilson was one of the colonial administrators employed to implement the policies of the protectorate government. He also coordinated a punitive expedition of the British military against the indigenous resistance in the territories of Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole, as well as in Northern and eastern parts of Uganda (Wilson 1907: 118). The consolidation of colonial rule through the project of ethnological collections began in 1907. In his letter, George Wilson (1908) claimed he was instructed by his Governor Sir Hesketh Bell to begin the project of a protectorate museum, to collect several artefacts such as agricultural implements, cooking items, basketry, blacksmith tools, native weapons, fertility, religious and healing objects.[4] Wilson's letter further stated that the artefacts would first be stored at the Entebbe administrative offices of the scientific department of the protectorate government. He also indicated that a sum of money equivalent to £10 was made available to the collectors to purchase the artefacts (ibid.).

Following Wilson's letter, colonial officials acquired the artefacts and gathered them at Entebbe until 1908. However, there was no proper house for displaying the cultural objects to the public. In the absence of proper storage and space for public display, Hesketh Bell immediately allocated a sum of money equivalent to £200 for building the first Sikh Temple Museum of the protectorate at Kampala.[5] Bell sketched the design of the building and thereby approved the construction of the Protectorate Museum. When construction was completed at the Lugard's fort in Kampala, the artefacts were transferred there from the administrative offices in Entebbe in 1908 for public display at the protectorate building. Subsequently, the official Sikh Temple Museum of the British protectorate government of Uganda was built at Fort Lugard in Kampala to display the ethnographic materials to the public. The artefacts were crammed in a small space and tagged with paper labels.

During the process of collecting these ethnographic artefacts, punitive measures were routinely deployed. People were arrested, killed and their spears or tools were confiscated as relics of a primitive society. By way of example, the evidence suggests that Kibuuka regalia were coercively taken by Rev. John Roscoe during his visit to Uganda between 1899 and 1902. They were then shipped as »sacred items of the war god of the Bugunda people« (Thomas 2016: 340f.) to the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. As will be discussed in more detail below, the Kibuuka objects were returned to Uganda in 1962 and displayed at the Uganda Museum. Similarly, the collection of Mubende regalia (stored as E 53.83 to E 53.155) have become part of the Uganda museum holdings and were gathered within colonial rule and under violent measures of subjugation. Today displayed in the ethnography gallery of the Uganda Museum, they were objects of spiritual and medical activities at the Nakaima shrine. This shrine memorized the Chwezi-Dynasty (13–14th century) and continues to hold important community functions among the communities. Yet the present rivalry over the ownership of the shrine site and the holding of the objects at the Uganda Museum signify the presence of colonial injustice in postcolonial Uganda. The regalia were looted by the British colonial rule after the murder of Omukama (King) Kabalega of the Bunyoro Kitara kingdom who had resisted colonial rule in the Western part of Uganda from 1870s to 1898 (cf. Otunnu 2016: 91–93). When the British fought against him, they violently scorched the land and people, they arrested, humiliated and imprisoned the Omukama, exiling them to the island of Seychelles in the Indian ocean. After careful selection of the cultural artefacts, perhaps some of the objects were shipped as ethnographic artefacts to western Europe while other objects – considered damaged or of negligible value – were crammed into the colonial administrative offices.

Interpretation and Presentation of Artefacts in Protectorate Museum-Uganda

The colonial government decided to relocate the ethnological artefacts from the administrative and scientific offices at Entebbe to the site of Lugard's fort. The site

was selected on the hill of Kampala where the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC) under Captain Lugard had established his military fort in 1891 (Otunnu 2016: 82f.). During this period of relocating the ethnographic artefacts, the objects so violently gathered were stored at the Sikh temple where they contributed to governing the society ›in a tribal mode‹. While the Sikh Temple Museum had been built and established by the special commissioner Hesketh Bell in 1908 to popularize the protectorate administration, it soon proved too small for the colonial propaganda of civilizing the indigenous society (Trowell 1957: 71, see Uganda Protectorate 1939: 6). In any case, the description of the artefacts in the protectorate museum revealed how the colonial masters reinterpreted the objects. Most of the artefacts were piled up in a small space having a wooden and glass case cabinet to both store and present ethnographic material to the public. As such, the interpretation and meanings of ethnographic artefacts corresponded to different meanings ascribed to the collection and the museum. To the local population, the presentation of the first museum was called enyumba ya amayembe (house of spirit). The keeper of the museum was omukulu ya amayembe (the head of spirit). The local communities had no interest in the museum collections because the colonial administration intentionally relabelled the artefacts (Deming 1966: 2; Trowell 1957: 72). The indigenous audience was unhappy with the presentation of the objects because the colonial administrators misinterpreted the cultural objects with negative attitudes as witchcraft or fetishes.

Fig. 1: Object label: Ganda Fetish, Ethnography Gallery No. E25. Uganda Museum. Photo: Nelson Adebo Abiti.

Towards the period of World War II, the colonial administration was faced with the challenge of a financial crisis, which also led to the neglect of the ethnological objects collected by colonial agents. Hence, most of the collection suffered damage. As a consequence, Margaret Trowell, an art teacher at the School of Art of Makerere

College, opted to relocate the ethnological artefacts from the Protectorate Museum to the newly formed Art school at Makerere college in 1942. Trowell also transformed the art studio to create space for the incorporation of ethnographic material just until 1953, when the Uganda Museum building was completed (Trowell 1957). After the transfer of the artefacts, a catalogue listing the ethnological material was published as Tribal Crafts of Uganda (Trowell/Wachsmann 1953). The catalogue was developed from the descriptive work of the colonial administrative officers, the police and the judiciary services. The young police recruits were known to provide information used for the labels of the individual artefacts. They also helped in the illustration of the artefacts by providing indigenous knowledge (Trowell 1957). The catalogue was also significant in structuring the layout for the classification and arrangement for the exhibitions of an African gallery at the Uganda Museum. The name of the gallery was slightly modified in 1961 to the ›Ethnography Gallery‹. Yet the mode, style of display, and labels for the artefacts remained unchanged, apart from occasional restoration. This showed that the colonial enterprise of cultural orientation had established the Protectorate Museum as an instrument of power to implement violent and coercive domination. Colonialism was also presented as part of both a supposed benevolent social uplifting, as well as a form of governance along the concept of ›tribe‹. Although the museum project was aimed at civilizing the native people in the enlightenment framework of ethnographic practice, it undermined pivotal indigenous knowledge and thus deprived communities in Uganda of the root for cultural rejuvenation and the survival of their society.

The first phase of museum development as a Protectorate Museum was, however, entirely an ethnographic project. As of 1954 in particular, the Uganda Museum was developed as a modern cultural institution in Uganda to expand the ethnographic project. The museum was opened on 30th June 1954 by Uganda's Governor, Sir Andrew Cohen. During the enforcement of the last stages of colonial rule, the official opening of the Uganda Museum was deemed a failure in terms of its exhibition displays (Wachsmann 1954: 3). There were encounters from farmers' groups and

trade union boycotts against the colonial regime (Kibanja et al. 2012: 412). Many of the artefacts in the wooden cabinets remained in the basement storage. The visitors were directed toward the basement storage area and the objects in it were labelled ›ethnographic‹ (Wachsmann 1954: 4). In addition to displaying ethnographic objects from the museum's storeroom, the museum curators also created an installation in the newly-finished exhibition gallery to illustrate a certain category of ›tribal‹ people as Nilo-Hamite ›tribes‹. This exhibition was also interactive, offering a sound installation of ›tribal‹ music played from upstairs (ibid.). Hence, in this first exhibition of what was crafted as a modern museum in Uganda, the society was divided into ›tribes‹.

As the transformation of the Protectorate Museum took effect, the incorporation of the ethnographic artefacts paved the way for the process of civilizing the society. The project that the colonial masters embarked on was to train young people in missionary schools to adopt Western ways of life against the purportedly primitive life of the natives. The indigenous life and the material culture were deemed to be of low quality and were termed a primitive technology (Bennett 1995: 6). The young Ugandan people were told to stay away from this primitive life. Hence, the perspective of the colonial civilization aimed to antagonize Ugandan cultural knowledge. The missionary training then depicted young people from the ›savage‹ culture with fetish objects of a past primitive life. Within the museum framing, the idea of fetishized objects was carefully reorganised into the ethnographic displays. The modern Uganda Museum and its curatorial practice took a hold of its ethnography as a discipline and exhibitionary architecture of ›tribal‹ people. Inside the museum, this was illustrated by a diorama map of the people and landscape of Uganda, distinctively identifying separated people, fixed in a constant location.

The Uganda Museum and Nation Formation

Following Uganda's independence from colonial rule in 1962, the management of the museum and the ethnographic collections became state policy. This national state

was a project of ethnography through the colonial framework of policies and regulations that were aimed at governing the society. When the ›tribal‹ ethnographic objects were assembled at the Uganda Museum, they were arranged into agricultural tools, homestead utensils, leisure, adornment and clothing, hunting, local industries of blacksmithing, salt mining, leather works and barkcloth making (Trowell 1957: 74). There was also an introduction of scientific and industrial ›development‹ exhibition models and a presentation of modern photography in Uganda. Alongside the ethnographic displays and the modern industrial shows at the Uganda Museum, Kibuuka objects were considered of national significance in the ethnographic collections in 1962. These were a set of ritual objects belonging to Kibuuka who was chief of the god of war in the Buganda kingdom. Kibuuka was a contemporary of King Nakibenge of the Buganda kingdom. Kibuuka's remains had been preserved in a barkcloth. The jawbone, umbilical cord and other objects were kept by priestess Muzingu in a shrine for worship in Mpigi within the Buganda area (Roscoe 1911: 301; Welbourn 1962: 16). However, before Uganda's independence, the Buganda minister of education Abubakar Kakyama Mayanja campaigned for the return of the Kibuuka objects in 1961 (Mayanja 1961; Bennett 2018: 217). After the Kibuuka objects were returned to Uganda in July 1962, they were first remade into historical objects and subsequently national treasures. They were then integrated into the ethno-history gallery of the Uganda Museum (Peterson 2015: 15). The Kibuuka objects were returned on long-term loan by the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge to the Uganda Museum. The assemblage of the Kibuuka objects on display coincided with the opening of the Science Gallery at Uganda Museum by the Prime Minister Milton Obote on the eve of independence on 8th October 1962. They were thus integrated into attempts to reintroduce ethnically defined cultural artefacts into the modern nation state.

Fig. 2: Kibuuka Objects redis- played in 1962 after they were returned from the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Ethnohistory Gallery, Uganda Museum. Photo: Nelson Adebo Abiti.

Politically, Mayanja was celebrated for having repatriated the Kibuuka artefacts, as Nicholas Thomas puts it: »Kibuuka relics were returned to Kampala« (Thomas 2016: 340f.). The process of repatriation was also supported by the Uganda Museum curators. Nonetheless, at the time of the returning Kibuuka Mayanja's involvement was viewed with caution by the new government since the ethnic divisions were rampant and had escalated to physical violence by the time the British protectorate government began to enforce colonial conquest. Mayanja's political demand for the return of Kibuuka in 1961 was partially achieved through the Cambridge University deciding on the Kibuuka objects to be repatriated and displayed at the Uganda Museum in Kampala. Since 1961, the continued holding of the Kibuuka objects in Uganda had been contentious. As Nicholas noted, in November 2007, the Kibuuka's

followers had stormed the Uganda Museum, intending to seize the relics but were prevented by the police guards of the Uganda Museum (Thomas 2016). Hence the British colonial power had much influence on the Uganda Museum concerning the conservation and presenting the cultural objects that belonged to indigenous communities.

However, the politics of national identity and museum practice in the post-independence period led to abolishing the functions of a royal system of governance that later caused the attack on the Buganda palace in 1966 and the subsequent confiscation of royal regalia by President Milton Obote in 1967. The confiscation of the royal artefacts was part of the militarization of the nation (Peterson 2015). National policies also led to changes in the state's approach to governing the collection of objects. This suggests that the militarization of the nation and the violence in Uganda had, and continue to have, implications for the ways through which 21st century museum practices are thought, and through which they change the meanings of ethnographic objects.

In contrast to the above, however, the Uganda National Museum also began to engage in documenting, collecting and exhibiting experiences of violence. This is pertinent given that the museum has aimed to recover the memory of violence and trauma experienced between 1986 and 2006 through its more recent work. Particularly in the Northern part of Uganda, a civil war had occurred for a period of two decades between 1986 and 2006 which had a devastating and traumatic impact on women and children. The hostilities, spanning two decades, saw the government soldiers of Uganda on the one side and the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) rebels led by Joseph Kony on the other. The prolonged civil war in Northern Uganda caused death, displacement, and the abduction of children. More than two million people were forced to seek refuge in congested Internally Displaced People (IDPs) camps (Mwenda 2010). About twenty-five thousand children were abducted. This culminated in the phenomenon of night commuters in Uganda – children walking

into Gulu at night seeking protection in the urban area and in camps for internally displaced people (Annan/Blattmann/Horton 2006). The issue in the post-conflict situation was to understand the memory of traumatic experiences, consciously appropriated as spirit beliefs and Acholi culture in the region.

The conflict had changed the landscape in Northern Uganda as well as people's mind-set, it required a process of resettlement in addition to reconstruction programs that could take the communities' cultural memory into account. In post-conflict reconstruction efforts, it is crucial that communities acknowledge the suffering caused to the survivors of the wars and the victims' experience of bodily harm suffered in the course of the violence and injustice enacted against the indigenous community. The recognition of the elders by the Uganda National Museum as key stakeholders in the reconstruction of cultural heritage was a positive step for documenting the difficult heritage of war. Indeed, the elders of Northern Uganda had foreseen the need to document cultural sites with significant memories and to preserve traditional dances, songs, and rituals as a way of rebuilding society with a dignified identity. This insight was a result of their long-standing experience in peace mediation, conciliatory effort, and uniting community.

Community Reconciliations

In Northern Uganda, the community memorialization was a form of bottom-up approach in a process of remembering the pains of war in a post-conflict situation. This community memorialization was a result of the aftermath of what happened when the civil war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda and National government soldiers broke out. The project on A *Memorial Landscape in a Post-Conflict Situation* and a mobile exhibition was implemented as *The Road to Reconciliation*. The team from the Uganda Museum collaborated with the communities and also continued to engage with civil society, religious leaders, the elders and the survivors. The beginning of a dialogue on memorial practices enabled the Uganda Museum to start rethinking its strategy towards community

memorialization. In my involvement with the project, the idea of an alternative model of learning with divergent views in a contested space of violence came to the fore (Abiti 2018). The experiences and knowledge gained from continuous interactions with people living in and around the four sites in Northern Uganda provided the project with an outcome for the exhibition on reconciliation and forgiveness.

The transition from war to peace required the re-introduction of *Mato oput*. This traditional ritual of healing and reconciliation was a form of reintegrating offending individuals – including former members of the LRA rebels – into their communities. The complexity of working with communities who knew their members as perpetrators, victims and bystanders was resolved by the communities themselves. The Ugandan writer Okot P'Bitek (1971: 155) pointed out that »the blood-feud, kwor, must be settled and if it is not settled the ghost of the deceased will bring much trouble to his kinsmen« (see also Onyango-Ku-Odongo/Webster 1976: 61–65). In addition to Mato oput, the Northern Uganda Transition Initiative (NUTI) was also founded in order to undertake reburials and reintegrate former abductees into the communities by stepping on eggs, or wong tong – a purification ritual in Acholi. In this context, reburials were »efforts to remake homes and reorder lives«, in a continued climate of uncertainty, by relocating the dead or materialities associated with them »from sites of displacement to former homesteads« (Jahn/Wilhelm-Solomon 2015: 182). These ritual ceremonies were performed because of post-war, psycho-social traumas that occurred when communities lost their relatives in the wars. At the site of my own participation, the implementation of the program demonstrated that the Uganda National Museum's work not only documented the reburials, it also helped to shed light on the problems that the continuous existence of unburied dead and missing persons – having neither graves nor representation – posed to the survivors and communities. The unresolved questions created a demand for curatorial practices at the museum as a forum of dialogue. By 2010, the Uganda National Museum had, as such, sought to change its curatorial practice by

enabling processes of mediation. The conversations with the survivors of war became meaningful when the communities began opening up by talking and providing ideas as to what is meant by knowledge of the past. The question, for example, of how we can make such knowledge useful to young people was posed. To which the answer emerged that it was the respect we gave them, and our deep listening that provided a platform for us to create a fruitful network of working with post-conflict survivors. Women and men were equal, each of them taking responsibility. We ate food together and we shared moments of joy. Yet the question remains: How do you maintain a network of diverse needs and how do you continue working with people that have narratives contrary to the official stories of national and state policies?

Fig. 3 and 4: Dialogue on the community-led exhibition »road to reconciliation«: with survivors of a massacre at the IDP camp Barlonyo, and with a young audience. Photo: Nelson Adebo Abiti

Artefact Reactivation

Certain cultural objects, such as spears, were central in the mediation work. The Uganda museum began to collaborate with the community in reinvigorating the *Mato oput* ritual practice. Why is it that the idea of new forums and community collaborations became significant to the society? The Mato oput ritual is an indigenous mode of a certain traditional justice mechanism, which was used to reconcile families from the angers and pains of violence that had occurred in the recent civil wars. The Uganda Museum, therefore, also used its space to create a

forum of creating community exhibitions on reconciliation. The collection of spears in the museum provided an important means to ritually integrate the communities into rituals of reconciliation. Originally collected by the colonialists as artefacts of warriors, they had been mainly displayed to show ›tribal‹ wars. In contrast, when the Uganda Museum decided to take the objects from storage and to offer them to the community for rituals, it reactivated their lives. Important artefacts such as spears also inherited the injustice and cruelty that had been enacted against communities. Originally, the spears had been serially classified on the basis of ethnic identity. Dialogical efforts made by the Uganda Museum to reunite artefacts with communities would begin a process of addressing structures, which have been in place since the foundation of colonialism. Beyond the violence that has burdened and caused traumas to communities, the Uganda Museum is attempting to remake the personhood of artefacts into a new form of knowledge that enables communities to perform certain rituals and ceremonies.

Documenting memories of violence is not a question of obsessively collecting objects, it is about enabling voices of communities and amplifying their ritual practices. The concept sought out and collected traces of material culture that would enable community memorials to take place rather than simply collecting everything into museum storage. The spears in Northern Uganda became important cultural objects for performing rituals of forgiveness during the reburial of the dead, the enthronement of cultural leaders and for mediating peaceful resolution in events of clan conflicts. Beyond their use as weaponry, they perform a healing process. The presence of oral histories and local knowledge systems embodied in artefacts challenges the colonial idea of transforming cultural materials into tangible museum objects in displays. Although colonial structures disrupted the orality of heritage, it is certainly the case that feasts, which are of importance to the society, as well as stories and touch have now been re-enacted to renew the life of artefacts. The physical materiality is remade in intangible practices.

My argument here is that orality is important in expressing the utility of tangible cultural material. The ›spear‹, which was once reduced to a serialised artefact of fighting amongst the warriors, regains its capacity to resolve conflict in the post war reconciliation process of Northern Uganda. Notably, memorial spaces of the communities in Northern Uganda have remade the material objects such as drums, spears, beads, and musical instruments as important tools for reconciliation and peace-building initiatives. Indeed, some fundamental questions emerge in addressing the community practices of memorialization in Northern Uganda; first, why are the communities using the spears in dances or *Mato oput* rituals for reconciliation when, in a very real sense, spears are meant as tools for hunting or fighting in war?

The spear has been the most important object embodied in the ritual process of reconciliation. In the account of these, the spear manifests itself as a symbol of authority, dancing ephemera and bending into performing reconciliation ceremonies. In mythical tales, the spear belonged to the eldest son whose father would hand over his power of authority through the spear. In contrast, certain situations reveal that the inheritors of the spear are not necessarily the eldest heirs. Colonial anthropologists have documented certain intangible beliefs whereby the function of the spear is to perform the ceremony of the *Jok* spirit in the Patiko chiefdom (Girling 1960). However, the original meaning of such intangible practices is not so readily comprehensible in the written records. When I asked the current chiefs in Northern Uganda whether they had such important royal spears in their possession, they were able to identify the objects but they did not own any of the typical double-head spears in the regalia. There are possible reasons why spears were lost during the war or why there are no specialised blacksmiths making such spears in this particular society. It is clear that the double-headed spears are not easily seen within the communities; they possess secret functions among the indigenous communities. But although the intangible knowledge of reactivating the power of spears was threatened by colonial violence it survived in the transmission

of oral expressions amongst the elderly population. Moreover, accessing important cultural objects remained often difficult for the elderly and thus the challenge remained to demonstrate the intangible knowledge practices such as the *Mato oput* and reburials at all. Therefore, the community collaborations with the museum are a form of sharing the artefacts and the immaterial knowledge. While the Uganda Museum once held the artefacts, they now become useful to the communities in order to facilitate solutions to their problems. The museum is being redefined to work outside of its structural wall through the activity of engaging with the communities.

Following the above discussion, spears are clearly significant objects in ritual performance as well as symbols of authority. In most cases the spears animate spirits during the annual feasts of *Jok* presided over by the priest or Ajwaka (p'Bitek 1971). When the spears are transformed from an artefact into a spirit, they acquire a power, by which they embody the new life of ancestors (Ocholla-Ayayo 1980: 101). In contrast, the ethnographic practices of collecting artefacts were violent. By displaying ethnographic objects without providing an historical analysis, we continue to ignore colonial violence, and we continue to promote colonialism and the acts of injustice. Yet the style of the museum, with its ethnographic gallery display, is old and it raises the question of visualising exotic representation. Unfortunately, Ugandans are faced with the question of mirroring themselves in the foreign narratives enacted in the museum. What kind of stories do we want to tell contemporary Ugandans? How does a young audience interact with the exhibitions linked to violence? Will the Ugandan Museum's old exhibitions be reorganized? And if so, how and who will be involved? Will the process of reimagining the practice of a new museology become institutionalized in management practice? What will finally happen to the concept of ethnography in museums? Should it be a dialogue, a rethinking, a reconciliation and a questioning of the old gallery?

Fig. 5:

Elder demonstrating ritual use of spear for Mato Oput, in Okoro village, Gulu district, Northern Uganda. 2014. Photo: Nelson Adebo Abiti.

A focus on investigating the ideas on colonialism suggests that the problems encountered within the ethnographic museum were constituted by discriminatory policies of divide and conquer as well as the creation of ethnic or ›tribal‹ cultures. Yet these museums accumulated the cultural property of colonial injustices, which enabled the imperial powers to subdue human beings in an evolutionary scheme. In the language of imperialism, the clue to the native society was to use the materiality of their cultural objects to understand and control local systems of power. Hence, the ›tribe‹ in Uganda is linked to the colonial marker of managing people into ›tribal peoples‹ as seen in the present ethnographic diorama display at the Uganda Museum.Therefore, the community memorial practice – proffered in the new form of museum practice – is an attempt to enable a museum community to work on restitution, decolonization and healing from violence in the form of a community project. Yet bridging the gap of colonial injustices and rebuilding the society require, in my view, a public discourse of listening to, and working with, the relevant societies. The example of the communities in Northern Uganda, who embarked on social ceremonies as form of healing, are significant insofar as they highlight cultural ways of transmitting knowledge. It has shown how the reactivation of intangible memories can help to manage conflicts and rebuild societies, using objects to express reconciliation in Northern Uganda (Abiti 2018). The process of community memorial also points to a debate on understanding the processes of memory-making in a local community, including how people's participation in a museum project might define its future outcome.

This article has undergone a double-blind peer-review.

The print version of this text is published in the Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften, issue "The Post/Colonial Museum", 2022, p 29-44. In order to make the issue "The Post/Colonial Museum" available to a wide readership, specifically on the African

continent, we decided to use the long standing collaboration between boasblogs and the Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften to successively publish all contributions in print and online (as DCNtR debate). We thank the editorial boards of both, the Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften and the boasblogs, as much as the publishing house transcript for embarking on this project together. Furthermore, our thanks go to the participants of the conference on Museum Collections in Motion, which was generously supported by the Global South Studies Center, University of Cologne, the research platform "Worlds of Contradictions", University of Bremen, the Museumsgesellschaft of the Rautenstrauch- Joest- Museum and the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany. Most of all, we thank the contributors to this debate for four years of exchange, debate and intellectual companionship.

Footnotes

[1]I have been working as a conservator of ethnography at the Uganda Museum since 2008 and started my work by compiling inventories of ethnographic artefacts. This article is a result of reflections on my encounters with the hidden and unidentified information on the artefacts that were stored at the ethnographic store of the Uganda Museum during the colonial administration.

[2]Racial descriptions of the people in the protectorate in Uganda were, according to Johnston (1902: 471), studied through natural history.

[3]Wilson George's (1908) »Deputy Commissioner's Circular«, concerning the founding of the Uganda Museum, was issued to all collectors (See also Uganda Protectorate 1939: 5).

[4]Wilson's (1908) circular tasked the District Commissioners to purchase a unique item, addressed to the Botanical, Forestry Scientific Department of the British colonial administration. He cautioned against duplication of the artefact(s)

purchased or donated. The MEMO required a native name attached to the artefacts. Perhaps the scientific department took over the task on writing the rest of the information about the artefact.

[5]The Sikh Temple Museum was derived from the Sikh religious naming from India (See Uganda Protectorate 1939: 5).

References

Abiti, Nelson Adebo (2018): »The Road to Reconciliation. Museum Practice, Community Memorials and Collaborations in Uganda«. In: Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe: A New Field for Museum Studies, ed. by Thomas Laely/Marc Meyer/Raphael Schwere, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 83–96.

Annan, Jeanie/Blattman, Christopher/Horton, Roger (2006): The State of Youth and Youth Protection in Northern Uganda. Findings from the Survey for War Affected Youth. Kampala: UNICEF, https://chrisblattman.com/documents/policy/sway/SWAY.Phase1.FinalReport. pdf (30.06.2021).

Allen, Tim/Vlassenroot, Koen (Eds.) (2010): The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality, London: Zed Books.

Assmann, Jan (2013): »Communicative and Cultural Memory«. In: Cultural Memories. The Geographical Point of View, ed. by Peter Meusberger/Michael Heffernan/Edgar Wunder, Dordrecht: Springer, 15–27.

Bennett, Alison (2018): »Diplomatic Gifts: Rethinking Colonial Politics in Uganda through Objects«. In: History in Africa 45, 193–220.

Bennett, Tony (1995): The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics, London, New York: Routledge.

Clifford, James (1988): The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Litera- ture, and Art, Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Coombes, Annie E. (1994): Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England, New Haven, London: Yale University Press.

Deming, L. M. (1966): The History of the Uganda Museum. Kampala: Uganda Museum. Girling Frank K. (1960): The Acholi of Uganda, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Harris, Clare/O'Hanlon, Michael (2013): »The Future of Ethnographic Museums«. In: Anthropology Today 29(1), 8–12.

Hicks, Dan (2020). The Brutish Museums. The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence, and Cultural Restitution, London: Pluto Press.

Jahn, Ina Rehema/Wilhelm-Solomon, Matthew (2015): »›Bones in the Wrong Soil‹: Reburial, Belonging and Cosmologies Exhumed in Post-Conflict Northern Uganda«. In: Critical African Studies, 7(2), 182–201.

Johnston, Harry Hamilton (1902): The Uganda Protectorate. An Attempt to Give Some Description of the Physical Geography, Botany, Zoology, Anthropology, Languages and History of the Territories Under British Protection in East Central Africa, Between the Congo Free State and the Rift Valley and Between the First Degree of South Latitude and the Fifth Degree of North Latitude, Vol. 2, London: Hutchinson and Co.

Kibanja, Grace/Kajumba, Mayanja/Johnson, Laura (2012): »Ethnocultural Conflict in Uganda: Politics Based on Ethnic Divisions Inflame Tensions Across the Country«. In: Handbook of Ethnic Conflict, Boston: Springer,

403–435.

Konaré, Alpha Oumar (1983): »Towards A New Type of ›Ethnographic‹ Museum in Africa«. In: Museum International 35(3), 146–151.

Lidchi, Henrietta (1997): The Poetics and Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures, London: Sage/Open University Press.

Mamdani, Mahmood (1996): Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mayanja, Abubakar (1961): Letter to the Vice Chancellor of the Cambridge University, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, file AA4/5/15. Mwenda, Andrew (2010): »Uganda's Politics of Foreign Aid and Violent Conflict: The Political Uses of the LRA Rebellion«. In: The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality, ed.by Tim Allen/Koen Vlassenroot, London: Zed Books, 45–58.

Ocholla-Ayayo, A. B. C. (1980): The Luo culture: A Reconstruction of the Material Culture Patterns of a Traditional African Society, Wiesbaden: Steiner.

Otunnu, Ogenga. (2016): Crisis of Legitimacy and Political Violence in Uganda, 1890 to 1979, Cham: Palgrave.

P'Bitek, Okot. (1971): Religion of the Central Luo, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.

Onyango-Ku-Odongo, Jamal Mikla/ Webster, James Bertin (1976): The Central Lwo During the Aconya, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.

Peterson, Derek (2015): Politics of Heritage in Africa, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Posnansky, Merrick (1963): »The Uganda Museum, Kampala: The Programme and the Organization«. In: Museum International 16(3), 149–162.

Rassool, Ciraj (2015): »Re-storing the Skeletons of Empire: Return, Reburial and Rehumanisation in Southern Africa«. In: Journal of Southern African Studies 41(3), 653–670.

Reeves, Scott/Kuper, Ayelet/Hodges (2008): »Qualitative Research Methodologies: Ethnography«. In: Bmj 337, https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.a1020 (30.06.2021).

Reis, Ria (2013): »Children Enacting Idioms of Witchcraft and Spirit Possession as a Response to Trauma: Therapeutically Beneficial, and for Whom«. In: Transcultural Psychiatry 50(5), 622–643.

Roscoe, John (1911): The Baganda: An Account of Their Native Customs and Beliefs, London: Macmillan.

Sarr, Felwine/Savoy, Beńedicte (2018): The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics, http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf(30.06.19).

Thomas, Nicholas (2016): »The Inhabited Collection«. In: The Antioch Review 74(2), 333–342.

Trowell, Margaret (1957): The African Tapestry, London: Faber and Faber.

Trowell, Margaret/Wachsmann, Klaus P. (1953): Tribal Crafts of Uganda, London: Oxford University Press.

Uganda Protectorate (1931): The Report of the Protectorate Museum, Kampala: Uganda Museum Archive.

Uganda Protectorate (1939): Report of the Uganda Museum Committee, Entebbe: Uganda.

Wachsmann, Klaus (1954): »Curators Report«. In: Uganda Museum Occasional Paper, 3–4. Welbourn, Fred B. (1962): »Kibuuka Comes Home«. In: Transition 5, 15–20.

Wilson, George (1907): »The Progress of Uganda«. In: Journal of the Royal African Society, 6(22): 113–35.

Wilson, George (1908): Deputy Commissioner's Circular of January 15, 1908, Uganda National Museum Archive, Courtesy of the Uganda National Museum.

Nelson Adebo Abiti *is the curator of ethnography at the Uganda National Museum. He holds an MA from the University of East Anglia (2015), received his Bachelor's degree from Makerere University (2003) and studied for a Diploma in Museums and Heritage Studies at the University of Western Cape, South Africa. From 2010 to 2013, Abiti headed a team of Uganda National Museum staff and Norwegian partners, who collaborated with several communities in northern Uganda to preserve and present the regional memory and, thereby, promote peace and reconciliation following a long civil war. The result of this cooperation was an exhibition entitled Road to Reconciliation. Currently, Abiti is working with the committee that revises Uganda's museums and monuments policy and legislation, and has been a core team member of the cooperation project between the Uganda National Museum, Igongo Cultural Centre and Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich, which is jointly curating exhibitions in Uganda and Switzerland since 2015.*