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Thinking About the Archive & Provenance Research

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Introduction

Carl Deußen

In the debate about the colonial past of ethnographic museums in Western Europe, provenance research has emerged in recent years as the main method for researching colonial legacies and addressing museums' need for decolonisation.[1] Museums and researchers have investigated the acquisition context of colonial era collections systematically or on spec to create a sound basis for dealing with these collections in the future. This process has led to a shift in the understanding of the collections themselves, which are increasingly understood as archives. Simultaneously, archival records such as documents, photographs, and sound or film recordings, previously overshadowed by the ethnographic objects, move to the centre. What has been lacking, however, is a debate about the theoretical implications of this approach – what kinds of knowledge can provenance research create?

Finding an answer to this question requires a closer look at the implications of understanding the ethnographic museum as an archive. The history of the humanities is defined by recurring moments of heightened archival attention, from Leopold von Ranke's call to enter the archive via Jacques Derrida's musings on archival fever to the present moment where the power structures and epistemic form s of violence inherent to archival institutions have become central concerns of academic inquiry.[2] Amir Theilhaber is right when he warns in his contribution that not every historical institution is necessarily an archive. Whether the ethnographic museum can be called an archive, in parts or as a whole, remains an open question, and yet our contributors' many fruitful approaches show that it is also a pertinent one. After all, beside their collections of artefacts, ethnographic museums often house an array of objects clearly identifiable as archivalia, from collection records and inventories to photographs, films, and field notes. As Tony Bennett et al. have argued, this heterogeneity of traces was precisely what defined the archival function of the museum: through the connection of different materials, the museum creates its "semiotic homogeneity."[3] And, as Alice Hertzog and Enibokun Uzebu-Imarhiagbe show us regarding the Benin Royal Collections, sometimes it is not the documents that matter, but the artefacts themselves, forming archives beyond a narrow Western understanding of the term.

Thinking about the ethnographic museums as an archive inevitably highlights its history as an imperial institution. Archive and empire have developed in close connection, and the ethnographic museum grew out of this proximity of imperial and archival power. As Thomas Richards has argued, imperialism was based on the utopian fantasy of epistemic access, of total knowledge about the subjected peoples and the rational management of their subjugation.[4] The ethnographic museum fits right into this imperial fantasy, using the reality effect of its collections and dioramas to create the illusion of complete knowledge of its ethnographised subjects.[5] This was of course an illu-

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1 Larissa Förster, "Zum Umgang mit der Kolonialzeit: Provenienz und Rückgabe," in *Museumsethnologie. Eine Einführung. Theorien Debatten Praktiken*, ed. Larissa Förster and Iris Edenheiser (Berlin: Reimer, 2019), 78–103.

2 Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record. On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2009), 2; Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

3 Tony Bennett et al., *Collecting, Ordering, Governing. Anthropology, Museums, and Liberal Government* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2017), 38.

4 Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive. Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London/New York: Verso, 1993).

5 See Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in The Novel, ed. Dorothy J. Hale (Malden/Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 229–34; Nicolas Thomas, *Entangled Objects - Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge/London: Harward University Press, 1991), 176.

sion: the ethnographic museum did not mirror reality but created it, along with the legitimisation for colonial officials to impose this fantasy onto the people it purportedly represented. As Anjali Arondekar argues, what mattered, in the end, was not so much the veracity of individual truth claims but rather upholding the fantasy that such access to the lives of the subjugated was indeed possible, and hence their control.[6] This is why many authors have identified the museum-as-archive as a tool of imperial violence, aimed at spreading imperial propaganda and hiding the brutal reality of empire behind a screen of supposed scientific neutrality.[7]

However, while this may be true in some cases, the studies united in this collection show that the ethnographic archive can also not be dismissed entirely. After all, the archive is not as homogenous and monolithic as it may fashion itself to be. Ann Stoler has amply shown that before focusing our research on the realms that lie beyond the imperial archive, first close attention should be paid to what the archive actually contains, including the many cracks and contradictions that open up beyond the imperial claims of epistemic access.[8] Neither can we dismiss the descriptive qualities of the archive entirely: what is contained in the museum is highly selective and defined by imperial power dynamics, but it is not meaningless. As many of the studies collected in this volume show, sometimes the materials meant to hide the brutality of empire turn out to reveal much more about it than their original collectors intended. The approach we take hence follows Arondekar's suggestion to "productively juxtapos[e] the archive's fiction effects (the archive as a system of representation) alongside its truth effects (the archive as material with "real" consequences)—not as incommensurate, but as agonistically co-constitutive of each other."[9] The ethnographic museum is a fiction built from real, unruly building blocks, and both aspects invite investigation.

What do such theoretical reflections entail for the relationship between the archive and provenance research in the ethnographic museum?[10] First, it points to the underlying danger of ignoring the theoretical perspective on the archive in favour of another illusion of access, this time not for empire but for decolonisation. Suddenly equipped with financial resources and political import, the various provenance projects may be enveloped by archival fever. Arondekar warns that "such archival turns inevitably cohere around a temporally ordered seduction of access, a movement that stretches from the evidentiary promise of the past into the narrative possibilities of the future."[11] The contributions in this volume show that such a "seduction of access" will eventually be disappointed as the materials in the ethnographic museum only offer very specific insights and, in most cases, do not allow a legalistic reconstruction of provenance. Taking the archives "fiction effects" into account, asking how an object precisely got into the museum might not be the most fruitful approach, nor the most interesting. Even in the cases where access is possible, the power dynamics that have created the archive threaten to govern this access, as Larissa Schulte Nordholt and Marleen Reichgelt remind us in their contribution.

Instead, the wealth of heterogenous sources that does exist inside the ethnographic museum might be used to formulate new inquiries that go beyond the surface of established imperial narratives, rearranging archival mate-

6 Arondekar, *For the Record. On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*, chaps. 1–2.

7 See, for example, Ariella Aisha Azoulay, *Potential History. Unlearning Imperialism* (London/New York: Verso, 2019); Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums. The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

8 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

9 Arondekar, For the Record. *On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*, 4.

10 This also includes other museums holding ethnographic collections.

11 Arondekar, 5.

rials in new and unexpected ways.[12] Such inquiries, represented in various forms in this book, will lead to complicated histories that enrich our understanding of imperial ethnography with nuance and indicate how the collecting of myriads of objects stabilised this global regime of exploitation. They may discover moments of "unreason" where the imperial logic broke down, hence providing important lessons for the present-day struggle against the multitude of imperial continuities that still shape our world.[13] And they may carry the movement towards decolonisation beyond the walls of the museum and the archive, leading to structural change throughout society. Wayne Modest has called ethnographic museums imperialism's "hyper-visible warts that remain", warning against an understanding of decolonisation that focuses on the visible symptoms instead of engaging the cause.[14] A theoretically grounded provenance research may achieve the opposite, using the museums visibility and resources to pose unexpected questions that shake not only the museum's foundations but also that of the society that created it.

In this sense, our collection begins with Knut Ebeling's analysis of provenance research's theoretical foundation. Inspired by Jacques Derrida's concept of the "archival evils", he calls into question the illusion of easy access to the past via the colonial archive. He argues that such archives were formed by imperial politics and that none of the information they contain can be understood as a neutral window to the past. Research, under such conditions, might mean resisting the archival promise and instead ask about the silences and lost voices resulting from colonial violence. He proposes to radically widen the conception of the archive to include all remaining fragments, especially orally transmitted knowledges that might offer a counternarrative to the hegemony of the paper archive.

Alice Hertzog and Enibokun Uzebu-Imarhiagbe flesh out this call for new archival sources and conceptions. They question the strict division between archive and collection, arguing that in the case of the Benin collections, the objects themselves constitute an archive. They present four different strategies for decolonising the archive: the reversal of perspective to investigate those who have created the archive, the digital opening-up of the archive, the collaboration with creator communities, and the acknowledgement of their "right to reply" and ownership of the archive. However, Hertzog and Uzebu-Imarhiagbe underline that the decolonisation of the museum archive might not have the highest priority for communities from the Global South. Focussing again on Benin, they show that for Nigerian scholars it is not provenance research but the return of the objects themselves that is expected to create new and important knowledges.

Samuel Bachmann and Marina Berazategui focus on the archival practices inside the museum. Using a doll taken from an Egyptian child and preserved at the *Bernisches Historisches Museum*, they argue against a mechanistic understanding of provenance research. Instead, they propose the concept of *narrative provenance* that takes into account not only the legality of an acquisition but also its historical context with all its relevant power dynamics. Secondly, they emphasise that the results of provenance research will equally become a part of the archive and thus require a decolonial practice of documentation. To that end, Bach-

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12 Sharon Macdonald, "Researching Ethnographic Museums in Europe," in *Museumsethnologie. Eine Einführung. Theorien Debatten Praktiken*, ed. Larissa Förster and Iris Edenheiser (Berlin: Reimer, 2019), 365.

13 Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2016), 232–34.

14 Wayne Modest, "Things Are a Changing or Perpetual Return. Horizins of Hope and Justice or of Anxiety," in *The Art of Being a World Culture Museum*, ed. Barbara Plankensteiner (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2018), 117; See also Johanna Zetterstrom-Sharp and Chris Wingfield, "A ' Safe Space ' to Debate Colonial Legacy ? The University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the Campaign to Return a Looted Benin Altarpiece to Nigeria" 7, no. 2019 (n.d.): 1–22.

mann and Berazategui propose concrete steps for how to achieve such a practice when faced with the rigid documentation system employed by most museums.

Marie Hoffmann offers a practical example for the limitations of traditional provenance research. She approaches the topic through a series of Norther French museums with collections from the Pacific, each presenting a unique archival situation. While some of them have next to no documentation available, others contain documents but have lost the corresponding objects during WWII. What unites them, however, is the general scarcity of information on the provenance of specific artefacts. Hoffmann points to some alternative strategies, such as taking the general behaviour of a collector into account, but in the end concludes that the provenance of most objects will never be determined through imperial archives. Instead, she argues for more cooperation with indigenous creator communities. Repatriation decisions should be made based on a community's need for an object rather than on some Western idea of legality.

In a similar vein, Carl Deußen uses the collection and archive of German collector and ethnographer Wilhelm Joest to question the archival logic of provenance research. He highlights a series of difficulties that arise when the coloniser's archive is used to determine the provenance of ethnographic collections: lacking material, questionable veracity, missing indigenous perspectives, and the sheer number of artefacts stored today in Europe's museums. Taking these issues together, Deußen cautions against an overly optimistic understanding of what provenance research can achieve and argues for a broader approach when it comes to the investigation of museums' imperial legacies.

Amir Theilhaber stresses the importance of museums as site for historiographic research. If museum collections are combined with other archival materials, they promise a wider, interdisciplinary understanding of imperialism and its effects on the peripheries of both colony and metropole. Theilhaber takes an ornamented shelf from the Moroccan display at the *Lippisches Landesmuseum* as a case study to show how detailed provenance research can reveal the complex historical processes defining an artefact. Far from being a representation of a timeless "Moroccan culture", the shelf embodies a specific historical moment, namely the alliance between Imperial Germany and Morocco against a French imperial intrusion. As Theilhaber argues, such provenance research based on heterogenous source materials can not only offer new historical insights but also redefine the possibilities of displaying the artefacts in question.

Rainer Hatoum shows that decolonisation efforts aimed at archival materials are seldom simple or straight-forward affairs. He explores the uneasy relationship between the notion of "cultural sensitivity" and scientific practice emerging in US archives during the last decades. In an attempt to decolonise their methods of conservation and presentation, these institutions increasingly restrict access to archival materials concerning Indigenous communities. Hatoum shows that this policy, while laudable in theory, can have unintended negative consequences, especially for materials of complex authorship and content, at times rendering them practically inaccessible. This raises broader questions about who has the authority over historical documents and on what basis.

Lu Zhang presents a specific collection of artefacts in movement and the archival trail they left behind: the 1935 Royal Academy International Exhibition of Chinese Art in London. For this exhibition, a substantial part of China's national treasures was sent to Great Britain in an effort to improve the young republic's international standing. The exhibition was highly successful and inaugurated a new era in the relationship between China and the West: while Chinese artworks entering European museums previously came mostly from imperial war loot and illegal excavation, this time the Chinese

Republic kept the full control over the objects and was recognised as a sovereign state and ally. Even though the artefacts had left China, they were also eventually returned; as such, the Exhibition of Chinese Art exemplifies the potential of globally mobile artefacts under the control of their rightful owners.

Finally, Larissa Schulte Nordholt and Marleen Reichgelt focus on the possibilities and dangers of archival decolonial scholarship itself. They argue that the archive is shaped by colonial histories and should not be approached as a mere collection of sources awaiting discovery by the historian from the Global North. Instead, they emphasise the power structures shaping how an archive can be used and how such use inevitably also shapes the archive. Schulte Nordholt and Reichgelt underline their argument with two case studies. The first focuses on a private archive in Nigeria holding the estate of an important postcolonial scholar. Schulte Nordholt points out that the very form of the archive reflects Nigeria's decolonial history. To enter it as a researcher from the Global North inevitably creates power dynamics that are neither simply beneficial nor exploitative but a complex mixture of both, making using the archive an ambiguous political act. In the second case study, Reichgelt explores her interactions with a missionary collection of photographs from West Papua. Initially, she had transformed the chaotic collection into an ordered database, working closely with the archival material to make it accessible. This access to the lives of the people depicted, however, turned out to be much more ambiguous than anticipated: while it promised to be a powerful resource for those portrayed and their descendants, it also exposed them to the potentially unwanted scrutiny of researchers on a global scale. This raises the question how this thitherto inaccessible material could be publicised sensitively.

Taken together, these case studies show the broad range of theoretical approaches to provenance research and the archive. They highlight problems and challenges but also offer an array of solutions for research, documentation, display. Taking all these insights into account, *Thinking About the Archive & Provenance Research* endeavours to pave the way towards a theoretically grounded, self-reflective and decolonial practice of provenance research

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Mal D'Archives Revisited or Archive Evils from a Postcolonial Perspective. An Obstructed View

Knut Ebeling

In the current public debate about the restitution of non-European cultural legacy, one gap (among diverse others) is especially conspicuous: the conditions of the search for the *Herkunft* (provenience) and provenience are systematically disregarded.[15] Postcolonial provenience research has been pointing this out for thirty years; accordingly, the various persons who have recently expressed themselves on this topic in public media have regularly pointed out the difficulty of reconstructing *Herkünfte* (proveniences) and that the funding for provenience research must, of course, be increased. But the political debate, in particular, often works with an illusion of transparency based on the impression that it would be possible, "without further ado", to reconstruct the distant and diverse *Herkünfte* of complicated intercultural transactions and media and to look into the past with an unobstructed view. In short: the means and media that are regularly employed for this view into the past and that are necessary for a successful reconstruction of *Herkünfte* are equally regularly ignored.

A media-theoretical view of the public provenience debate has the task to dissolve this illusion of a direct view into the past – to the degree that postcolonial provenience research has not long since done so. Instead of working with the illusion of a direct representation of the past, the difficulties and obstructions of view that are immediately part of the picture should be displayed. The media-theoretical gaze thereby has the task of showing the conditions that (almost) every provenience research immediately faces. Because the condition of *Herkunft* is simply (at least if one is deriving the concept of *Herkunft* genealogically from Nietzsche and Foucault): the archive.

Provenience research *is* archive research. One must keep in mind that all provenience research, which is currently being conducted *en masse*, is primarily archive research and not necessarily research in museums.[16] Most of the information about the diverse *Herkünfte* and accompanying phenomena from the transport of non-European artifacts into European collections and museums is found – solely in archives. It is not, or only in exceptional cases, found in the museums or libraries, and usually not publicly at all. Even when parts of the colonial archives are publicly accessible, these things are often still under seal, presumably for good reasons.

Herkunft in the Archive

The question of Herkunft is thus also a question of the archive. Without the archive, no provenience; where does one go when one wants to learn something about one's *Herkünfte*? Into the archive. Archives are less the conditions for the possibility than for the reality of research on *Herkünfte*, its historical a priori, so to speak. If, during the historical transactions of cultural artifacts, no one had come up with the idea of recording their evidence and accompanying circumstances, then today no provenience research could be done; and if no one had come up with the idea of establishing special sites for this evidence and these notes, to transport them from the past into the present, then they

15 This paper was originally written in the context of the conference organized by Sarah Dornhof and Nadia Sabri, *In Search of Archives/En quête d'Archives*, which was held from Jan. 23 to 26, 2019 in the *silent green* cultural quarter, Berlin. I thank Verena Rodatus and Michi Knecht for their generous remarks on postcolonial provenience research, without which this article would not have been possible in this way.

16 Cf. Patrick Gathara (2019): The path to *colonial reckoning is through archives, not museums*. *In: Al Jazeera Online*, 15 March 2019. Last accessed 18 March 2019. Thanks to Michi Knecht for drawing my attention to this article.

would presumably be even more scattered and more difficult to locate than they already are.

Herkünfte require archives; without the archive, no research on origins and provenances. But none of the museum people who, in the context of the public debate, have recently been asked about their provenience research go into the archive, show their archive, or even refer to their archive – or to the chaos of documents and evidence that they cite and for whose organizing they naturally require as much funding as possible. It is true that Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr, for example, occasionally refer to their "archive" – for example in an interview published on YouTube[17] – but a closer look shows that this archive is merely an inventory of objects (although German federal institutions have more than once reported that not even such lists of the relevant objects exist).

But if many artifacts are not even registered, how can research on their *Herkunft* be conducted? And wouldn't "research" here mean, rather than gathering inventory lists, critically researching how these lists were created, calculated, and encoded? Wouldn't "research" here have to mean resisting the surveillability and clarity of lists and exposing oneself once again to the complexity of the transmission of each individual artifact?[18]

Abysses open up in the archives, abysses of complexity and undecidability – undecidability particularly there, where they are least desirable: in the political debate, which clamors for quick decisions. That's why the archive, the medium of much provenience research, remains underexposed. One doesn't see the archive; as the a priori of provenience research, it remains invisible, transparent, in the background, always already there.

One reason for this notorious ignoring thereby seems more or less immediately plausible: one doesn't want even more problems and querulousness. In the search for the *Herkünfte* of non-European artifacts, so many problems, so many questions, and so many impossibilities stand in the way in the public debate that one probably would not want to estimate their sum as "archive", on top of all the rest. Because as the real precondition, the archive displays more the reality than the ideal of a search – and one would rather not burden the public debate with that, too. We already have enough problems, after all.

And it is understandable: especially when calling for more public monies, it is naturally an interest of all the players in the debate to have provenience research initially seem *possible* rather than to depict it from the beginning as *impossible* (as the complete reconstruction of all the circumstances accompanying the transactions of many researchers appears). Here, the argument of the archival complications and the resulting impossibilities only gets in the way. After all, archives, like media in general, not only show something; by showing, they also encode something and blank out other things. And one need not long ask what was presumably supposed to be blanked out when transactions involving intercultural artifacts were recorded.

The Politics of the Archive

But why were the *Herkünfte* of non-European cultural artifacts recorded at all (or not recorded); wouldn't it have been more convenient to just engage in the transactions without registration, without re cording, without uncomfortable questions? Who comes up with such an idea? First, we must note: registration was probably the exception and lack of registration

17 https://youtu.be/9YSHpGNp8AY. Last accessed 15 August 2022.

18 On the demand to digitalize colonial archives and make them accessible, cf. Larissa Förster/Iris Edenheiser/Sarah Fründt/Heike Hartmann (eds.) 2017: *Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit. Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte*, https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/18452/19814/00-Einfuehrung.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. Last accessed 18 March 2019. Thanks to Verena Rodatus for drawing my attention to this article.

the rule. Archives always record only fragments of reality – and what they record usually obeys calculations about what should be told and what should not. This true about archives in general, about colonial and museum archives, but very especially: it is easy to imagine what was supposed to be recorded and what was *not* supposed to be recorded about the complicated procedure of appropriating and seizing colonial artifacts and transferring them to European collections and museums. It is true that negotiations between equal partners was definitely possible, as Fritz Kramer recently showed in the example of Leo Frobenius;[19] in the example of Tanzania, Michael Pesek has shown that colonial dominance was also certainly shaky.[20] But bilateral negotiations were hardly the rule. Vice versa: in colonial contexts, there was usually a porous and fissured difference in power and knowledge – differences and abysses that paved the colonial artifacts' way to Europe.

A quick impression of the porous, fissured situation of many colonial archives is provided by a short – the sole – remark from Michel Leiris on the political function of archives. Leiris was hired precisely as archivist with the Vice Director for Economic Affairs. When Griaules wanted to know whether we could have access to the court archives in the various colonies, the Vice Director answered that the officials of the colonial administration were under very strict orders, ever since foreign expeditions had used the documents they had been permitted to view in order to attack French colonial policy and to conjure up incidents before the League of Nations."[21]

Archives are not only part of political negotiations, they are not only part of politics – they *make* politics. Archives encode political processes – in the colonial situation, more than anywhere else. For this reason, in the colonial situation, the suspicion soon arises that archives serve concealment – that archives are created to conceal certain things and to show them only to selected parties; that archives do not document and record actual courses of events and occurrences, but document and record only certain things, in order to conceal other ones. This would turn the colonial archives from sites of neutrality and impartiality into sites of concealment and partisanship: in brief, into accomplices of the power-holders.

But this suspicion, too, which postcolonial provenience research has already widely expressed, may be too general. Additional questions arise immediately: who records with which media, in which language? And who decides in the first place what is to be recorded in accordance with what logic – and in relation to which jurisdiction in which future? Who decides what an archive is and to what purpose one should be established? Who controls who can put something in it and who may not? And how should we deal today with these never-neutral documents full of gaps? How should the various power interests be made visible? Shouldn't these archives of concealment be read against themselves, "against the grain", and used against themselves in order to find out "how things really are" (Ranke)?[22]

To approach these complex questions of collecting policy, one must point out that in recent decades such disparate research disciplines as archaeology, provenience research, ethnology, and the history of science have developed concepts that touch upon such policy,

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19 Cf. Fritz W. Kramer, Koloniales Erbe, in: *Lettre International* (2019) 124: 12-19.

20 Cf. Michael Pesek (2005): Koloniale Herrschaft in Deutsch-Ostafrika. Expeditionen, Militär und Verwaltung seit 1880, Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus. Thanks to Verena Rodatus for drawing my attention to this article.

21 Michel Leiris (1985): *Phantom Afrika. Tagebuch einer Expedition von Dakar nach Djibouti 1931-1933. Erster Teil*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

22 Cf. Margit Berner/Anette Hoffmann/Britta Lange (eds.) (2012): *Sensible Sammlungen. Aus dem anthropologischen Depot*, Hamburg: Verlag der Kunst/ Philo Fine Arts; Ann Stoler (2008): *Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton University Press. Thanks to Michi Knecht for drawing my attention to this article.

but unfortunately do not lessen its complexity: concepts like research on the biography or trajectory of objects ask, first, about *traceability*, i.e., about what was recorded and what was not (and for what reasons). Second, however, they ask about the discursivation of artifacts, which could change dizzyingly, especially in the transition from the context of *Herkunft* and that of arrival, for example when objects in European museums, of all things, are classified as "culturally authentic", "aboriginal", and "untouched" after their violent.[23]

The Site of the Archive

But reading "how it really was" depends not only on the media in which the past was filed away and is now read again. It also depends on *where* it is read and filed away. The site of archivation has consequences, especially in the colonial context. It appears immediately clear that an archiving of the conditions of the transfer of ownership, of the transport, or even of the robbing of the artifacts – and the problems of archiving begin already here, because the designation of the operation in question already archives its nature, its assignment, and its mission: that is, the concepts of transfer, transport, or robbery – at any rate, it appears immediately clear that the site of the archiving contributes to defining the events, and not only conceptually. The nature of the operation of transferring the objects from colonial to European contexts is in part defined by the site where they are archived: thus, archiving and an archive in Berlin (for example) will have entirely different implications, meanings, and effects from documentation within the regions from which the artifacts were transported away – regions in which the institutions of recording and of the archive may not even exist.[24]

The site of recording and of the archive is thus not only interesting; the site of the archive is an integral part of the recording, its message, and its content. The site has *agency*, it inscribes itself in things and has an effect. It may even determine what is in the archive and what is not, what is collected there and what is passed over in silence there. In 1996, Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'archive* reflected on this site of recording and of the archive, a reflection that Ann Laura Stoler intensified in 2002.[25] Especially in regard to Derrida, from today's perspective we can ask: has anything about reading *Mal d'archive* changed in the light of postcolonialism? What are the archival evils – the *Mal d'archive* – of the (post-)colonial archives? What are the archival evils of the restitution debate? And do the museum people feel sick when they look in their archives, so that they understandably want to avoid this look?

Derrida's *Mal d'archive*, very briefly, was written in London – i.e., also in a postcolonial condition, one could say –in the form of a reflection on the Sigmund Freud archive, or better: on Freud's home in London, which at that time was in the process of being turned into a museum. So, here, too, was a certain situation of transferring objects – maybe not from one territory to another, but from one institutional order (a private home) to another (the public museum).[26] Derrida conceives his archive theory on the occasion of a situation in which the *site* is important. He, the Algerian-born son of Sephardic Jews, conceives the archive and its dominance from its site, from the site of its dominance.

Philosophically, he does this with the Greek term *arché*: because according to Derrida, the

23 Thanks to Verena Rodatus for drawing my attention to the research on object biographies, as well as to their inherent paradoxes.

24 Cf. Förster et al., *Provenienzforschung*, Note 4.

25 Ann Stoler (2002): Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form, in: Hamilton, C., Harris, V., Taylor, J., Pickover, M., Reid, G., Saleh, R. (eds.) *Refiguring the Archive*, Dordrecht: Springer.

26 The distinction between public (state) archives and private archives is central also for the volume edited by Förster et al., cf. Förster et al., *Provenienzforschung*, Note 4.

arché doesn't mean only dominance, but also the site of dominance, not only power, but also its localization: *arché* is not only dominance, but also the site of dominance, *there where* it is; Derrida is not thinking solely of power, but of power based on its site.[27] But powers are fragmented, not only in the colonies; there is power and there are those who take it. Power fragments, in the colonial context usually not only between the colonial rulers and the ruled, but within other groups, for example local rulers, who usually were different people from the colonialists.[28]

In that Derrida's archive theory localizes dominance in the site of the archive, power is always already the power of the archive and archival power; the division between colonial archive and counter-archive appears to be artificial, because the archive was never neutral, but always already the archive of a site and of the rulers over this site. Would a "neutral standpoint" be conceivable at all at this point? How would it be secured and how overseen? How would it be secured for the past, and how for the future? What would be "neutral" archives of the colonial situation? At this extremely sensitive and painful point, where a radical self-examination could begin, only one thing seems clear: whoever rules over the archive determines not only the recording of the past; he controls the recording of the past only to also determine what from it should someday arrive in the future and what should not.

The Future of the Colonial Archive

We have now arrived precisely in this future. It is the precise site in time where we find ourselves: as recipients of messages preserved (or not) in the past and that we testify to today: so, here we are now, recipients of messages in bottles from the past to the future, to the future that the colonial rulers, the transactors, the world travelers could hardly have imagined – in that future where we conduct research on their machinations, their transactions, and their plundering raids, where we once again turn over every stone in our collections that they brought to us. Could they have ever imagined this situation? In their colonial situation, could they have ever pictured that their remnant, their legacies would indeed be combed through so meticulously, as we are doing today? Could they have ever imagined that we would haul them into court? They would probably be turning in their graves.

To put it in a nutshell: they, the former colonialists, the colonizing states, are now under suspicion; those who no longer live and who can no longer be questioned are put on trial in absentia – which is why we depend on their remnants, their testimonies: an archaeological situation. In this archaeological situation, (not only postcolonial) provenience research seeks among the remnants for the kind of future that has inscribed itself in it; for the future that the colonial masters once imagined, did they simply carefreely preserve documents that twined around the objects? Or did they already begin to select the traces, to falsify them, to adjust them to their own logics, and to make them fit? Did the perpetrators cover their tracks? Did they have a consciousness of their perpetration? Who were the witnesses of their transactions? Was the archive the institution of testimony, or of complicity? As improbable as our present situation may have seemed 100 or 200 years ago – it is the situation that every archive foresaw and toward which it flies as targeted as an arrow: the archive only finds itself in the future for which it transports its past.

The Absence of the Archives

But there is not only the archive, its content and its gaps, what was said and what was passed over in silence – the colonia l situation confronts us with a much more radical situation that we have to conceive today: with the ab-

27 Cf. Förster et al., *Provenienzforschung*, Note 4.
28 Cf. Fritz Kramer, *Koloniales Erbe*, Note 5.

sence of archives, with the situation that in one place, possibly at the site of the events, there are no recordings and no archive at all – which doesn't mean that nothing happened here, but merely that it was not recorded in this way, was not archived, was not institutionalized – that there is no institution of the archive at the scene of the crime? How do we think about the colonial archive when there is no archive at all? Or if there is one only on one side? How do we think about archives that were always the archives of the perpetrators? And how do we think about the total absence of archives – which of course is the question posed by many postcolonial situations? How do we search for archives if they don't even exist? And how can we integrate this absence of the archive in our thoughts, how can we confront the concept of the archive with its own absence?

This situation of the absence of the archive is significant, too – especially, of course, in those contexts in which the past was transmitted primarily orally. The absence of the archive radicalizes the situation of its gaps: suddenly the point is not that recording was selective and full of gaps, but that for long stretches of time and across huge regions nothing was recorded at all! This one-sided absence of the archive and of archiving is, of course, extremely significant – but in no way does it mean there were no witnesses and no testimony (because the traditions of oral history, of course, are above all ways of witnessing and bearing witness).

But in these contexts, can one speak of archives or of archiving at all? Wouldn't we need here a substantially expanded concept of the archive, a concept of the archive that, for example, would be extended to include the perspective of ethnology?[29] For how does classical or conventional archive theory deal with, for example, oral traditions of transmission? Who back then would have thought of interviewing the witnesses of the removal of the artifacts – much less would have had the media to do so?

There is not always an archive and an archiving; testimony and its institutions often remain one-sided: in the postcolonial situation, it often appears as if only one side had witnesses (the archives of the former colonial states) and the other did not (the absence of archives in many colonized states) – if one could speak only of states, because of course the absence of state and institutional structures plays a role that must not be underestimated. *En quête des archives* thus also means seeking archives that may not exist, seeking archived material, where none may exist, and reading the gaps that were not supposed to be read. In any case, it means seeking the Other of the archive and confronting the archive with its Other.

29 Cf. for example Elisabeth Povinelli, The Woman on the Other Side of the Wall: Archiving the Otherwise in Postcolonial Digital Archives, in: *differences* (2011) 22 (1): 146-171. Thanks to Michi Knecht for drawing my attention to this article.

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The Paperless Archive. Recasting Benin Collections as a Displaced Archive

Alice Hertzog & Enibokun Uzebu-Imarhiagbe

This contribution examines the relationship between the ethnographic collections of Benin works in Switzerland and its associated archival collection, questioning to what extent the archive can serve as a tool of decolonization in the context of provenance research. In the process of our research, we have identified four strategies for engaging with paper archives in museums. We present these here but also argue that whilst museums order objects and archives as distinct categories this does not necessarily hold for source communities. Indeed, for many members of Benin society, the objects themselves are an organized repository of historical material. In response, we suggest reconsidering the Benin collections themselves as a displaced archive, an archive that is composed of ivory and bronze rather than paper.

Our findings draw on the first year of the Swiss Benin Initiative, a collaborative research project that aims to establish the provenance of roughly one hundred objects from Benin City currently held in eight Swiss public museums.[30] It combines multiple disciplinary perspectives, works with both Swiss museum professionals and communities in Nigeria, and draws on fieldwork, interviews, and archival research[31]. It aims to provide context, evidence, and case-studies to support decision-making regarding the collections' future, and establish which pieces were looted by the British Army in 1897 during the destruction and sack of the Kingdom of Benin.[32]

The Benin Bronzes have become centrepieces in the debate on restitution, colonialism and cultural heritage. Recent archival scholarship has shed new light both on the context of violent acquisition by the British Army[33] and on the sustained Nigerian efforts to recover their cultural heritage.[34] Archival research has also been undertaken on the dynamics of circulation of the Benin Bronzes on the art market[35] whilst the *Pitt Rivers Museum* in Oxford[36], the *National Museum of World Cultures* in the Netherlands[37] and the *Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum* in Cologne[38] have all recently published initial results on the provenance of their Benin collections. In our attempt to establish the provenance of the Benin objects in Switzerland, we have conducted research in museums and collections in Switzerland but also abroad.[39] Our

30 A full overview of the project and the complete listing of objects can be found here: https://rietberg.ch/en/research/the-swiss-benin-initiative

31 Tisa Francini, Esther, and Michaela Oberhofer. "Traces of Colonial Injustice: Collaborative Provenance Research on Artworks from the Kingdom of Benin." In *Pathways of Art - How Objects Get to the Museum*, edited by Esther Tisa Francini. Scheidegger und Spiess AG, 2022.

32 For an extensive account of the military expedition of 1897, Hicks, Dan. *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution.* London: Pluto Press, 2020 and Phillips, Barnaby. *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes.* London: Oneworld, 2021.

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

34 Savoy, Bénédicte. *Afrikas Kampf Um Seine Kunst: Geschichte Einer Postkolonialen Niederlage.* München: C.H. Beck, 2021.

35 Bodenstein, Felicity. "Notes for a Long-Term Approach to the Price History of Brass and Ivory Objects Taken from the Kingdom of Benin in 1897." In *Acquiring Cultures: Histories of World Art on Western Markets*, edited by Bénédicte Savoy, Charlotte Guichard, and Christine Howald. De Gruyter, 2018.

36 Hicks, Dan. *The University of Oxford's Benin 1897 Collections: An Interim Report.* University of Oxford, November 2021.

37 Veys, Fanny Wonu, ed. *The Benin Collections at the National Museum of World Cultures.* Provenance, #2. Leiden: Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 2021.

38 Bedorf, Franziska. "Traces of History: Connecting the Kingdom of Benin with the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne." Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, 2021.

39 Over the last twelve months, we have consulted archival material held in Amsterdam, Basel, Bern, Berlin, Benin City, Cologne, Dublin, Dresden, Geneva,

paper first presents four strategies we have identified to engage critically with museum archives. It then turns to engage with the Benin collections as an archive in and of themselves.

The first strategy is to identify the perceptions and practices of those who produced museum documentation. The archives themselves provide a limited account of the Benin perspectives and interpretation surrounding the artefacts and their significance. At times, they portray Benin culture as an extinct society, the remains of which need to be preserved. An example of this is the reason given by the *Museum der Kulturen* in Basel (a member of the Swiss Benin Initiative) for acquiring Benin objects that were looted by British soldiers. In their annual report of 1899, it is stated that given the destruction of Benin City by the British, it "considered it our duty to save a least some samples of this culture, which has now disappeared forever, for our collection, too."[40] Here we perceive the need to salvage the cultural production of extinct societies, but also how Switzerland, despite not having its own colonies, was embedded within the colonial project. Museum documentation in this sense is to be consulted as an archive of Switzerland's involvement in the colonial project, sites from which to remember "the manifold ways in which the institution and collectors were entangled with European colonial expansion."[41] The narratives it produces are at times incomplete or misleading, but as Stoler[42] reminds us, such archives, whilst remaining a device of power, highlight the uncertainty, anxiety, and confusion that were equally inherent to the colonial project.

A second strategy in seeking to interrupt the existing power relations within the museum archive is to provide access to a broader audience. In the context of the Benin collections, the drive to digitalize archival resources is opening up new possibilities for collaborative research. Noteworthy here is the platform Digital Benin[43] which as of mid-2022 will publish online the listing of 124 museums in 20 countries holding royal treasures from Benin City. The Swiss Benin Initiative will use this platform to publish archival material associated with Benin objects as a measure of transparency and accountability. Further initiatives include the digitalisation of the archives of traders and dealers of Benin objects, for example the William Ockeford Oldman Archive,[44] not only digitalized, but also transcribed by a team of Smithsonian online volunteers.[45] Another instance is the forthcoming digitalisation by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa of William Downing Webster's stock books, a prominent British trader of looted Benin objects.[46] In rendering these archives accessible online, such initiatives contribute to democratizing access to museum archives, enabling potential knowledge transfers between new publics.

A third strategy is to decolonize museum archives by actively reaching out and engaging directly with concerned communities, incorporating their voices into the archives. One such example is the project *Archives Vivantes*, which discussed photographs and museum records of the Dakar-Djibouti mission (1931-1933) with various actors in Senegal and Benin, including artists and cultural professionals.[47] In

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Hamburg, Lagos, Liverpool, London, Leeds, Neuchatel, New York, Oxford, Paris, Stuttgart, St Gallen and Washington, Wellington, and Zurich.

40 Fritz Sarasin, Report for the Ethnographic Collection of the Basel Museum, 1899, Authors translation from German.

41 Bachmann, Forthcoming.

42 Stoler, Ann Laura. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

43 The digital database is set to launch in September 2022 at https://digital-benin.org/.

44 Smithsonian Online Virtual Archives, Collection ID NMAI.RM.001 - https://sova.si.edu/record/NMAI.RM.001

45 For more on the Smithsonian Digital Volunteers see: https://transcription.si.edu/.

46 https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/agent/34847 - Registration Number CA000229.

47 Gautheron, Marie. "Archives Vivantes: Regards Africains Sur Quelques Objets de La Mission Dakar-Dji-

the case of Benin City, this strategy is also heavily at play in the work undertaken by Paul Basu and his team within the project *Museum Affordances*, recently presented in the exhibition *Re:Entanglements* at the MAA in Cambridge.[48] The exhibition juxtaposed historical archives from the collections of Northcote Thomas' early 20th century anthropological surveys of West Africa with contemporary responses of artists and community members to the material. In doing so both projects engaged critically with the legacies of the archives, not only interrogating the conditions under which they were produced but also asking what such historical documents mean for different communities today. These projects transform the archive, introducing a multiplicity of voices and contributing new commentary to existing documentation.

A final strategy is that developed by the Indigenous Archives Collective in their 2021 position statement "Right of Reply - Indigenous Rights in Data and Collections". This statement, we quote, "asserts the rights of Indigenous peoples to challenge and respond to their information and knowledges contained in archival records held in Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museum institutions through a Right of Reply."[49] The notion of the Right to Reply is one that recognises the issues and inherent biases within the colonial archive and reinserts indigenous voices and knowledges, as well as enacting the self-determination and sovereignty of affected peoples. This initiative echoes discussions between indigenous North American communities and museums the United States to establish procedures within the archive that honour indigenous traditions in terms of controlling access to sacred objects or photographs of deceased members[50]. In this last strategy, there is a shift from commenting on archives as an affected community, to making a claim on them and their content.

These four strategies each present varied entry points to engage critically with the museum archive. They involve moving beyond the archive as a site of control, identifying the biases within it, rendering archives accessible through digitalisation, engaging with communities of origin and promoting a right of reply. They provide guidelines for our research, offering up various entry-points from which to engage critically with museum archives as we research the provenance of the Benin objects in Swiss museums. Our research, however, prompts us to go beyond these strategies and ask: what constitutes an archive from the perspectives of communities in Benin City in the first place?

Listening to various actors in Benin City, from palace and guild members to curators and academics, it is the objects themselves that form a significant but fractured archive of Benin City. The official museum archives have little to offer in terms of historical documentation of Benin culture. Instead, this documentation is present in the form of the objects themselves. In Benin language, the term for remember, "sa-e-y-ama", means literally to cast a motif in bronze and the act of casting is one that captures historical moments.[51] The material culture commissioned by the palace, produced by the guilds, and currently in public and private collections overseas, was the primary form of documentation of court life and signi-

bouti." *Ateliers d'anthropologie*, no. 51 (March 31, 2022).

48 Exhibition (Re:)Entanglements, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge 22.06.21-2004.22. Project website: https://re-entanglements.net

49 The full call can be accessed at: https://indigenousarchives.net/indigenous-archives-collective-position-statement-on-the-right-of-reply-to-indigenous-knowledges-and-information-held-in-archives/

50 Molinié, Antoinette, and Marie-Dominique Mouton. "L'ethnologue aux prises avec les archives - Introduction." *Ateliers d'anthropologie. Revue éditée par le Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative*, no. 32 (August 20, 2008).

51 Ben-Amos Girshick, Paula. "'Brass Never Rusts, Lead Nevers Rots': Brass and Brasscasting in the Edo Kingdom of Benin." In *Material Differences: Art and Identity in Africa*, edited by Frank Herreman. New York: Gent: Museum for African Art; Snoeck-Ducaju& Zoon, 2003.

ficant events. These included battles, coronation ceremonies, or the arrival, for example, of foreign Portuguese or Dutch traders.

Since the 16th century, the Palace of Benin City has been containing the kingdom's records, notably in the form of brass plaques and sculpted ivory tusks. When the British Army invaded the city in 1897, they found over one thousand Bronze plaques laying under a layer of dust. These pieces were intentionally produced to recall past events, with the official guilds of the Ihoge (the recorder of royal histories) and Ogbelaka (the royal bards) deciding on what was to be included and excluded from the official archive. For the Benin art historian Patrick Oronsaye, "the plaques are visual representation of our history, major events that are taking place in the Kingdom for the last 800 years are recorded in those plaques and ivory tusks, even the memorial heads are histories themselves, each of them has a story behind them."[52]

Restitution debates have often centred on the argument that objects are more than objects and that in line with the ontological turn museums artefacts are also beings with souls and spiritual entities. Yet what we wish to suggest is that they are also archives, material archives that are tangible traces of a people's past. From the perspective of communities in Benin, with a predominantly oral culture, the artefacts themselves constitute a precious account of their past, and their prolonged absence has produced an interruption in oral transmission. For many of those we interviewed, a key factor in restitution of museum artefacts is the anticipated return of the kingdom's archives.

Even within the royal family, the looting of artefacts has impeded the transmission of key historical information. In March 2022 we were granted an audience with the present King of Benin, Oba Ewaure II. He told us how as a student in New Jersey in the late 19070s he had been invited to the opening of an exhibition on Benin artwork in New York. The young prince and heir apparent was interviewed at the vernissage by the New Yorker but found himself unable to answer any of their questions or provide any additional expertise. He told us, "They were asking me questions, what is this, what is that? Well I don't know! The British stole them a long time ago, so I haven't seen them." Instead of claiming ignorance, the Oba, who pursued a career in overseas diplomacy before ascending the throne, was highlighting how 1897 had disrupted the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next and created a disconnect between the community and its material heritage. The heir apparent's experience is one shared by Nigerian scholars and artists today and is further complicated by border regimes and visa regulations that make it increasingly difficult to travel to Paris, Berlin or New York to access works held in overseas collections.

Edo people are unable to access their archives and, at the same time, the current custodians of the objects in Swiss museums are unable to decipher the historical accounts engraved on the Ivory tusks or depicted on the plaques. Much like the quipu, the knotted cord device used by the Incas to keep imperial records[53], the Benin archives, removed from the community that produced them, are currently indecipherable. On the other hand, in Benin City, their absence has weakened oral transmission, with many guilds relying on sources produced by Western art historian and curators to access their heritage. These accounts often focus on the aesthetics of the work rather than their context of production or the historical narratives they transmit. Their return would not only enable skilled local experts to read them, it could also help foster oral traditions and cultural transmission, allowing concerned communities to access this historical resource

52 Interview with Patrick Oronsaye, Benin City, 23.06.2022.

53 Urton, Gary. "Quipus and Yupanas as Imperial Registers." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Incas*, edited by Sonia Alconini and Alan Covey, Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 2018.

and as such reconnecting oral traditions with their material counterpart. As Patrick Oronsaye argues, "when these objects are returned to us, you are returning to us our very heritage, our history. In Benin we live our history, we talk about our stories, as if we are a part of them - returning objects to Benin would be the greatest thing that has happened to us."[54]

For scholars in Benin today, the restitution of the Benin artefacts is a means to re-assemble an archive in the hope of deciphering it. As Prof. Kokunre Agbontaen-Eghafona[55], head of the anthropology department at Benin City University, recently explained in a workshop held in Benin City: "We know that they are our documents, that was how we preserved our history. The plaques, especially the plaques, were like a book." Picking up a copy of Dan Hicks recent book, the Brutish Museums, she told us, "So if I take this book, and I tear a page of it and send it to Germany, send x pages to different museums in Switzerland, randomly, that is how I see our art, so if we gather everything together in one place, we will be able to read and understand (...) you'll be able to read the history, interpret and know who they were talking about." In this sense, provenance research within museum archives could be considered as one step in the restitution process of Benin City's archive. In terms of knowledge production, the Swiss Benin Initiative contributes in part to addressing colonial legacies and creating an evidence base for dealing with contested collections. However, for Nigerian scholars, the most promising work in terms of knowledge production is set to occur not in preparation of their return in the archive, but in the aftermath of repatriation when the archive that matters to them is reassembled.

We are aware that there is always the "risk of muddying the waters and confusing what an actual archive is, and ... what archivists do"[56]. Or, in line with concerns of anthropologist Zietlyn, abuse a term which has become a victim of its own success and is at risk of "collapsing under the weight of metaphoric overextension."[57] And yet, comparing categories of material culture and knowledge systems across various communities is one of the primary tasks of museum anthropology. In the case of the Benin pieces in Switzerland, this means recasting the distinction between archive and collection. To do so enables us to identify alternative epistemologies that might enrich both Western understandings of museum collections, but also inform museum practices regarding the future of contested collections.

In conclusion, this second debate series "Thinking About the Archive and Provenance Research" has positioned provenance research as one possible method for addressing museums' need for decolonization and questioned the theoretical implications of this approach. We were asked what kinds of knowledge provenance research can actually create. This contribution, drawing on our experience of our collaborative, multi-sited provenance research, proposes one response that draws on a southern epistemic of the archive. Our four strategies not only present ways to overcome the museum archive as a place of domination, but also addresses ways in which such museums could be decolonised. Furthermore, our strategies suggests that if post-colonial provenance research aims to draw on a multiplicity of sources and voices, then it must also ask those involved what constitutes an archive for them. For many oral cultures whose material heritage features in ethnographic museums,

54 Interview with Patrick Oronsaye, Benin City, 23.06.2022.

55 "The Swiss Benin Initiative, Research and Dialogue with Nigeria" Workshop held at Benin University, 22nd March 2022.

56 Schafmeister, Julia, and Amir Theilhaber. "Collections, Archives, Repositories. Thoughts about Terminology from a Peripheral Ethnological Collection," *DCNtR*, April 5, 2022.https://boasblogs.org/dcntr/collections_archives_repositories/.

57 Zeitlyn, David. "Anthropology in and of the Archives: Possible Futures and Contingent Pasts. Archives as Anthropological Surrogates." Annual Review of Anthropology 41, no. 1 (2012): 461–80, p. 465.

their immediate concerns might not be decolonizing the museum archive but re-appropriating their own archive of objects.

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Documenting Coloniality. From Absent Information to Narrative Provenance

Samuel Bachmann and Marina Berazategui

Ethnographic collecting in the late 19th and early 20th century was a method of colonial knowledge production and served the narrative of European cultural and scientific dominance.[58] We therefore understand ethnographic museums themselves as colonial archives.[59] Although they are always incomplete and biased, they are promising historical sources for the investigation of certain persons' and institutions' roles in concrete moments of collecting in colonial contexts.[60] Furthermore, they shed light on the processes of colonial knowledge production on the basis of the acquired materials.

As archives, museums consist of collections of material objects and accompanying immaterial knowledge. The knowledge is compiled in collection archives, catalogues, and databases, where information is not only documented and preserved but also constantly added and altered. Provenance research results, for instance, eventually re-enter into the databases and the catalogues and thereby transform the archive. Documenting the findings of provenance research, therefore, has the potential to either reproduce or to question the coloniality inherent to objects in said collections.

When looking into the acquisition history of ethnographic collections from around 1900, in tendency, some information is highly dominant in museum archives while other is often missing. The farther you go back in an object's history, the less a museum usually knows about the moments in which it changed hands. Hence, documenting the coloniality of an object's provenance particularly means dealing with scarce and blurry information and making entirely absent information visible. It also means to take into consideration that museum documentation never is a neutral tool.

In our research[61] we investigated the moments of acquisition of selected parts[62] of the ethnographic collection at *Bernisches Historisches Museum*. In collaboration with the documentation team of the museum, we integrated our research results into the database. Using an example case, we present below the main challenges faced during this process. In particular, the highly standardized documentation system of the museum was incompatible with the claim to document absence, invisibilisation, or omittance of information typical for colonial knowledge production. Given the required standardization of information in museum databases, the question is, moreover, how to deal with the narrative complexities of individual provenance histories of material heritage.

The Complexities of Moments of Acquisition

In December 1934, the Bern resident Armin Kellersberger donated a series of objects to the historical museum of Bern, including an Egyptian toy doll. In a letter to the museum's ethnographic curator, Rudolf Zeller, Kellersberger mentions the doll and writes in a laconic tone that "the Nubian child, who had to leave

58 Cp. Habermas & Przyrembel 2013, see: Zimmerman 2013.

59 Cp. Bachmann 2022, forthcoming, 2023.

60 The understanding of a "colonial context" refers to the definition provided by the Guidelines for the Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts, issued by the German Museum Association, 26.

61 The project "Spuren kolonialer Provenienz. Die Erforschung ethnografischer Sammlungsprovenienzen anhand des 'Zeller-Archivs' am Bernischen Historischen Museum" was conducted between April 2021 and March 2022. For more information see https://www.bhm.ch/de/provenienz/spuren-kolonialer-provenienz (Accessed 30.10.2022).

62 We identified objects and entire collections that would require further research because the traces found in the archival files of the ethnographic department related to collections acquired in formally colonized territories, they contained human remains, or pointed at otherwise dubious, unequal, or violent moments of acquisitions.

Doll from Abu Simbel, Egypt, Inv.Nr.: 111947. © Bernisches Historisches Museum.

me the doll in tears at the behest of the baksheesh-hungry mother, certainly still longs for it today."[63] From further reading of the correspondence, we found that this change of hands probably took place in spring 1927 in Abu Simbel, where Kellersberger used to travel as a tourist.

This purchase was an acquisition in a colonial context since the kingdom of Egypt (1922-1953), although formally independent, was still under British military occupation. Egypt's exceptional cultural sights, furthermore, were centres of European scientific activity. Although we can say that this change of hands was ultimately a lawful purchase, understood as a historical moment, it is much more complex. This provenance moment, in which a wealthy Swiss tourist was willing to give money to a begging woman only in exchange for her child's toy, opens up a whole series of questions and factors that arise in provenance research today.

First, the situation is representative of the unequal economic power relations which are ubiquitous in colonial acquisitions. Second, as this situation could just as well be happening right now somewhere in the world at a tourist destination in the exact same way, it exemplifies very well that the coloniality of collecting is not simply a matter of the past. Third, if we understand the documentation of provenance research as a simple history of ownership and acquisition, we will entirely fail to grasp the

63 BHM Archive, Sign. A.001.009.003, original in German: „Das Nubierkind, das mir s.Z. auf das Geheiss der Bakschisch hungrigen Mutter die Puppe unter Tränen überlassen musste, sehnt sich gewiss heute noch danach." Letter from Armin Kellersberger to Rudolf Zeller, 19.12.1935.

historical relevance of this moment in time when a toy doll changed hands in Abu Simbel and became cultural heritage preserved in a Swiss museum for the century to come.

As provenance research approaches ethnographic collections as historical entities, we suggest that, ideally, the following elements of a moment of acquisition are considered and reconstructed in-depth: objects exchanged (what), people involved (who), way of acquisition (how) and historical context (when and where). Provenance research, therefore, is more than mere ownership history.[64] If the totality of these aspects helps to understand a historical moment of acquisition regarding its complexity, then the documentation needs more than a simple list of names and dates separated by semicolons. To highlight the need for detailed documentation, we propose the concept of *narrative provenance*.

The Coloniality of Documentation in Museums

Although, historically, ethnographic collecting must undoubtedly be described as a systematic removal and extraction of cultural capital to the Global North based on unequal power relations, the individual change of hands examined do not always simply represent moments of direct exploitation, like the one just described. The stories behind these artefacts' biographies do sometimes also speak of colonial resistance, they can be the only remaining evidence of family or community members or of lost ideas and practices and they can help understand the people and their individual as well as social relationships.

When objects enter a collection (or sometimes even already when they are being collected in the field), they are catalogued and typologized to fit into the categories of museum documentation. As Hannah Turner (2020) has shown, the categories and methods of documentation are inherited from natural science and thus give the impression of being neutral and objective. While they have contributed to the institutionalization of ethnology as a discipline a long time ago, they have also contributed to the erasure of certain narratives related to these objects and to the solidification of colonial conceptions of knowledge.

Through various technologies, these classifications and conceptions persist into the present.[65] Museum databases used nowadays are the descendants of previous museum documentation such as ledger books, card catalogues etc. and thus still contain classifications that are sometimes false, problematic, or even racist. In addition, the museum database is the result of many processes of invisibilization of certain information regarding the objects.

The omittance and invisibilization of information is most obvious in relation to the documentation of people. For example, in the case of the doll, the only person documented is the collector who is still known by his name in the database almost a hundred years later. On the other hand, neither the child nor the mother have been documented and we are still unable to identify these people more precisely.

Provenance research is a tool to understand the people and the contexts with which artefacts were in touch during their long lives. The problems, however, started when it came to the task of documenting the multifaceted narratives identified along their provenance history in the database. Moreover, since at the end of the research project much information was still lacking, we wanted to document this absent information to highlight the many processes of invisibilization at play in museum documentation.

The museum's primary tool for documenting knowledge, the collection database, turned out to be incapable of handling the complexities of the diverse histories of the objects observed as well as of handling absent information. On the contrary, knowledge preservation

64 Cp. Förster 2019.

65 Cp. Turner 2020.

in the database requires constant categorization, typologization, and standardization of information – all classic instruments of colonial knowledge production.

There is a danger that the findings of supposedly post-colonial provenance research will, inadvertently, further favour colonial knowledge production by just relying on the same old tools of standardization. The knowledge produced through provenance research is thus in a constant state of tension between the standardized categories inherited by previous documentational practices and the reality of individual complexity.

For the documentation of our research results, we tried, as far as possible, to capture this narrative complexity by documenting the four aspects mentioned above using the tools available. Each dataset created represented a change of hands, entailing information as detailed as possible on the *who*, *where*, *when* and *how* of these moments of exchange.

"Who?" – Documenting Unknown Identities

The most documented persons in the museum archives are male European collectors. Non-European persons involved in an acquisition moment are systematically misrepresented or totally neglected. Information regarding their identities and agencies are scarce and very often entirely lacking. For the historical reconstruction of the colonial moments of acquisition, however, their biographies, ideas and practices are essential.

In the archive, most colonized people do not figure with their real name, apart from a few exceptions of people with high social status. Otherwise, non-European persons are identified in relation to a racial, ethnical, or geographical ascription to underline the authenticity of the acquisition – like the label "Nubian" in the example above.

To avoid reproducing these ascriptions, the unknown individuals must be documented anyway. The questions that arise are thus: how do we document missing names and identities? How do we make unknown people known again? How do we document the "Nubian child" who was forced by their begging mother in Abu Simbel to hand over their doll for a little money?

In our research, the changes of hands of unknown but surely existing persons who possessed an object before it came into European hands were documented in separate datasets. These many unknown individuals, however, are recorded as the same unknown person in the database, which is frustrating because we thereby reproduce their namelessness. On the other hand, at least we make the quantity of unknown previous owners visible. One task of provenance research documentation, therefore, is to identify and highlight the process of invisibilization of people in museums.

"How?" – Documenting Unknown Ways of Acquisition

Usually, the inventory books of museums quite accurately account for the ways of acquisition by the museum itself. Thus, museums often know from whom and when they have received an object and whether it was donated, deposited, or purchased. The ways of acquisition of the previous owners, however, are much less known, especially in cases of colonial moments of acquisition. So, we most often do not know how exactly an object came into European hands.

There are a few exceptions, like in the Kellersberger case, where there is a written account of the change of hands, which in the language of simple ownership history, was a legal purchase. However, historically speaking, it still was a problematic exchange. Therefore, for provenance research – and provenance research documentation – it is imperative to think further than simply in terms of 'ways of acquisition'. In both cases, regardless of whether the mode of acquisition is known or not, the whole historical context in which the change of

hands took place must be considered and documented

"Where and when?" – Documenting the Historical Context

Knowing the *who* and *how* is not sufficient to understand a moment of acquisition. Moreover, mere temporal and geographical data of a historical event are also meaningless if not combined with each other and in relation to specific biographical and other contextual information.

Returning to the child's doll, we do not only know that Armin Kellersberger purchased it from its mother in Abu Simbel in 1927. We also know that Kellersberger was a participant in a guided tour through the ancient Egyptian site. Thus, he was an early tourist who could afford to travel privately. We also know that the mother, who begged for money, obviously was in a precarious situation. The unequal economic power relation led her to sell her child's toy in order not to starve.

Considering all these aspects enables us to better understand the coloniality of the moment of acquisition, which must be part of contemporary provenance documentation in museums. As mentioned above, currently the museum documentation is incapable to incorporate this kind of information that is concluded from contextual knowledge.

Evaluating the Historical Context: Between Legality and Ethics

Finally, it was important for us to develop a system of evaluation of the investigated change of hands in order to anticipate and appreciate the normative complexity of a moment of acquisition based on its various aspects. Furthermore, such a rating could be used in systematic and long-term provenance research policies of the museum to highlight the urgency to take further measures.

The resulting rating included criteria of legality and ethics along a scale from "unproblematic", to "lawful", to "problematic", to ultimately "unlawful".[66] If the source material was considered insufficient, the rating "no evaluation possible" would be assigned. With regards to the doll, rating the change of hands between the child and Kellersberger as unproblematic would not do justice to the situation. We therefore chose to label the change of hands as "lawful", which means that, although it was a legal purchase, it is ethically problematic due to the unequal power relation in place.

Every evaluation of a change of hands must be justified and contextualized. The normativity of our research and especially of our evaluation, which is neither neutral nor objective, is also documented and thereby made transparent. To further contextualize our judgment, we added the date and a reference to the research project with each evaluation of a change of hands.

Documenting Provenance Research: What for?

Doing provenance research and documenting the history of its own collection is a responsibility of the museum. Moreover, including narrative provenance information as well as making missing information visible in the database allows to complement and challenge the existing knowledge about the collection from a historical perspective.

Given the diversity of acquisition contexts, we suggest that provenance research goes beyond questions of legality to which the discipline is often reduced. Provenance research looks not only at the legality of an acquisition,

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66 "Unproblematic" (unbedenklich) equals lawful and ethically unproblematic, "lawful" (rechtmässig) but not ethically unproblematic, "problematic" (bedenklich) means that the legality of the change of hands cannot be proven and that there is a substantiated suspicion of unethical or illegal actions, while "unlawful" (unrechtmässig) is always problematic.

but also more precisely at the entire context. The case of the doll is a good example which forces provenance researchers to think beyond the framework of legality. In our research, it was also crucial that these results were integrated into the database and not gathered in a separate documentation tool or system. In this way, anyone in the museum working with this object in the future will possibly include the contextual complexity in their work.

Lastly, provenance research documentation and particularly the proposed rating could be a first step used by an institution to initiate concrete measures based on research results. We suggest that provenance research on large sets of objects and its systematic documentation in the database can serve as a basis for an institutional strategy for the handling of colonial collections, which ought to go beyond mere research.

Conclusion – Toward Narrative Provenance

If the ethnographic museum is consistently understood as a colonial archive, it has manifold potentials for exploring colonial ideas and practices of knowledge production. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that the absence of information is at the centre of this archival knowledge. Missing information about the who, how, where and when of exchanges, about the identities of colonized people, and about intricacies of historical encounters and narratives – the "missing-ness" – constitute the museum as colonial archive.[67]

The concept of *narrative provenance* helps understand the main challenge of documentation of provenance information, allows for the explicit notion of what is missing and anticipates that provenance research ought to be more than mere ownership history. It is supposed to enable the critical reconstruction of the historicity of an object's movement through history and thereby do justice to the agency of everyone involved in the transformative moments of it changing hands. Moreover, for a better understanding of the coloniality of a historical moment, biographical, sociohistorical, and other contextual aspects need to be considered and documented.

For these reasons, it is essential that provenance research gives rise to further innovation in museum documentation. The documentation should also include the possibility of source criticism and be able to include, for example, oral sources or accounts of experts from the descendant communities of the collections. It must be able to incorporate multivocality and it must always be made clear who documented information, when, for whom and in what context.

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67 In the outlook, this argument is relevant and can be connected to a debate around the concept of "missing-ness", which is currently still particularly concerned with human remains in relation to museums. See: Moosage, Rassool, Rousseau 2018.

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Provenance Research Before Repatriation: The Limits of Museums' Archives

Marie Hoffmann

As calls for cultural objects' repatriations[68] are increasing and museums are being confronted with the colonial aspects of their collections and of the institution itself, one of the responses from the museum world is to highlight the need for research and documentation. In short, the argument is that in order to know what to return, one needs to research provenance and how the artifacts came to enter the collections.[69] In July 2021, Thomas Dermine, newly named Belgian Secretary of State for Science Policy, launched a four-year research program aiming to document the provenance of artifacts in federal museums. This project particularly concerns the *AfricaMuseum* in Tervuren, but also the *Musée des Sciences naturelles de Bruxelles*. The program comes in parallel with a new legislation project on artifact repatriation which would allow the transfer of all these artifacts from the public domain to the private domain of the State, to render them alienable.[70] It is not a new topic for the *AfricaMuseum*, whose colonial collections have been the subject of numerous controversies. In France, the *Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac* is also following that path: in 2021, it launched a new research project on Canadian and American collections dating from the 17th to the 19th century to "shed new light on the provenance and context of the objects preserved in France".[71] These examples are just a few among many, as more and more western museums are participating in these movements which have seen an acceleration these last years, supported by society and political figures. France cannot be brought up without mentioning the Sarr-Savoy report commissioned by President Emmanuel Macron and published in 2018. The report, which followed Macron's speech at Ouagadougou University in 2017,[72] set high expectations in France and in many other countries around the world,[73] recommending the restitution of several thousands of artifacts to African countries. But these hopes were dashed by the lack of action following the report: indeed, only a few artifacts have been repatriated since then.[74] This disappointment is expressed, for instance, by activists such as Mwazulu Diyabanza, dubbed the "Robin Hood of Restitution Activism"[75], who made international headlines.[76]

In this context, it seems crucial to question the idea of provenance research in connection with object repatriation. What can we really learn from archival records about artifacts? Could we really use this documentation as a guideline for artifact repatriations? My doctoral project aimed at documenting the provenance of Pacific[77] collections (2539 artifacts)[78]

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68 In this paper, the word "repatriation" will be preferred to "restitution".

69 Vikan, 2014; Förster, 2016; Hunt et al., 2018; Scorch, 2020.

70 https://www.rtbf.be/article/la-belgique-presente-sa-politique-de-restitution-des-oeuvres-une-approche-systemique-qui-permet-deviter-de-restituer-au-cas-par-cas-10798431 Retrieved 25-02-2022.

71 https://croyan.quaibranly.fr/en/the-project Retrieved 28-02-2022.

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73 The Time even listed the two academics among "the 100 most influential people of 2021", Adjaye, David (15 September 2021). "Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy: TIME100 2021". *Time*. Retrieved 06-05-2022.

74 Including 26 artifacts to the Benin Republic, 1 to Madagascar, 1 to Senegal and 24 human remains to Algeria.

75 https://news.artnet.com/art-world/mwazulu-diyabanza-netherlands-1936340 Retrieved 27-02-2022.

76 For instance, the American podcast, *I Want To Report A Theft*, by Resistance, Gimlet Media.

77 An inventory of Pacific collections in French museums compiled between the 1940s and the 1990s identified the geographical provenance of the artifacts.

78 This paper will not consider human remains: no matter how they might have been "acquired", hu-

in five museums in Northern France founded between 1825 and 1864.[79] Using records kept in museums as well as municipal and government archives, my goal was to trace the origin of the artifacts from their museum repositories to the countries of their makers. Using this research as a case study, this paper aims to highlight the limits of archival documentation in the context of artifact repatriations.

Tracing the origin of the objects proved more complicated than anticipated. Although most of the donors were identifiable, the provenance trail often got cold beyond a few intermediaries or even beyond the donor themselves[80], and collectors could rarely be identified. In general, provenance research mainly generated information about the interpersonal connections, networks, and exchanges between notables of northern Europe (Belgium, England, France), which are, for the most part, irrelevant to repatriation issues. The previous "owners"[81] of the artifacts could only be identified for 56% of the 2539 objects, leaving 44% with no identifiable provenance. The numbers vary a lot depending on the institution. In Boulogne-sur-Mer, 90% of the former owners could be identified, a sharp contrast with the *Musée Berthoud*'s 47%.[82] Unfortunately, in some cases there is nothing to be learned from the archives: the name of the former "owner" and sometimes even the date of the acquisition by the museum remain unknown. The most significant example in my corpus is the *Musée d'Histoire Naturelle* in Lille, which has held the Moillet collections since 1990. Its ethnographic collection includes around 13 000 objects from all around the world and is defined by the *Musée d'Histoire Naturelle* as "one of the richest ethnography collections in France".[83] However, due to the chaotic history of these collections, there are almost no archives documenting the objects, as the documents were either lost or destroyed,[84] making it almost impossible to comprehend the context of acquisition for most of the artifacts. Only 19% of the former "owners" can be identified, leaving 81% with no name (and, most of the time, date) associated with their acquisition by the museum. This case, by the sheer scope of the archival lack, is unique in my corpus, yet the absence of records is a constant issue and calls into question the relevance of archival research when considering repatriations.

Despite the archival obstacles, 32 collectors were identified, even though the way they acquired the artifacts was seldom documented. This number corresponds to only 16% of the 2539 artifacts from the corpus. Even when archives on the collectors' stay and travel in the Pacific are available, most of the time the collectors do not mention the context of the acquisition. There are a few exceptions, such as Maurice Maindron and Achille Raffray, two entomologists travelling in Papua New Guinea for the *Muséum Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle* in Paris in 1876/7. In his writings, Raffray mentions, for instance, the need to enquire about the origins of the human skulls that are being brought to them. He displays a real awareness of the acquisition, referring to the risks of

man remains cannot be treated as objects and their repatriation cannot be placed on the same level as artifacts.

79 The *Château-Musée de Boulogne-sur-Mer*, *Musée de l'Hôtel Sandelin* in Saint-Omer, *Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dunkerque*, *Musée Moillet* in Lille and *Musée Berthoud* in Douai.

80 Among the 95 donors identified, only 8 were women.

81 The persons who donated or sold the artifacts to the museum.

82 The numbers were respectively: Boulogne-sur-Mer, 90%; Dunkerque, 71%; Saint-Omer, 50%; Douai, 47%, and Lille, 19%.

83 https://mhn.lille.fr/la-collection-ethnographie Retrieved 28- 02-2022.

84 This fits with the collection's history: the artifacts were exhibited only 67 years between the museum's creation in 1851 and the transfer of the collections to the *Musée d'Histoire Naturelle* in 1990. The museum archives, if they ever existed, have been lost. Moreover, Cadet highlighted the limited documentation produced by the museum administration. Between 1851 and 1948, only two inventories were made and there was no entry register (Cadet, 2001: 57).

buying stolen or illegitimately acquired skulls and therefore acting as "a receiver".[85] Another collector, the navy Admiral Albert Léon Zimbert, described in an 1888 letter to his sister the way he acquired artifacts in the Pacific: the "first concern is to ask if there are any weapons for sale", as well as trade pipes, tobacco, and matches.[86] But these are two rare examples of when the acquisition process is mentioned. When this information is lacking, the general context of the collector's presence in the Pacific (a military expedition, a scientific mission, etc.) provides essential clues in setting a broad context for the acquisitions. A large proportion of the corpus collectors (59%) were members of the navy, some of them belonging to the naval infantry, sent to the Pacific for colonial military expeditions between the 1850s and the 1890s. As the Sarr-Savoy report reminds us, war looting was an essential component of colonial conflicts. The circumstances of the collectors' presence in the Pacific can help identify illegitimate acquisition contexts and therefore justify repatriation requests.

When available, the personality of the collector might also help overcome the lack of data. This is the case for Alphonse Pinart, an explorer usually described as an ethnologist and linguist. He is the former owner of the Tapuanu Mask, inv. 88.3.57, from the Nomoi (Mortlock) Islands, kept in the *Château-Musée* of Boulogne-sur-Mer.[87] Pinart has produced a large number of notes and travel journals. Based on these sources[88], he appears to have been actively involved in grave robbing and seems to have acquired artifacts without really caring about how they were acquired and from whom. In his notes, Pinart rarely mentions artifact acquisitions; however, he describes in length his

Image 1: Tapuanu Mask – inv. 88.3.57 - Boulogne-sur-Mer Museum © Franck Boucourt-ACMHDF

intensive interest for collecting human bones, particularly skulls, listing several occurrences of what could nowadays only be qualified as looting burials. His notes document his extensive interest in gathering a large collection of skulls, in line with the scientific "fashion" of the time.[89] This skull collection may have been commissioned by Armand de Quatrefages and Ernest Hamy, scientists from the *Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle* in Paris and both Pinart's mentors. The two Parisian scientists mention Pinart several times in their book *Crania Ethnica*, conceived as an encyclopedia of human skull classification and published in several volumes between 1873 and 1882.[90] Pinart's collecting practices are also corroborated by some of his contemporaries and fellow trave-

85 Raffray, 1879.

86 Archives of the Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse, Douai, Letter from Albert Léon Zimber to Berthes Zimber, May 31st, 1888.

87 Cf. Image 1.

88 Bancroft Library, BANC MSS Z-Z 17, Alphonse Louis Pinart papers (transcriptions courtesy of Guillaume Lescop).

89 This type of human remains collecting was very common in the 19th century in connection with the development of anthropology as a science (Poskett, 2019; Redman, 2016). Pinart displays a real awareness for the acquisition, referring to the risks of buying stolen or illegitimately acquired skulls and therefore becoming "a receiver" (Raffray, 1879).

90 Hamy & De Quatrefages, 1882.

lers, such as Constance Gordon Cumming, who indicates that Pinart "has a collection of skulls, enough to supply a resurrection army".[91] Therefore, it might be legitimate to assume that every one of the artifacts he collected, unless documented otherwise, might have been acquired under suspicious conditions, legitimizing a repatriation request. When available, information on the personality and behaviour of the collector may provide an informative background for the acquisition context when considering repatriation.

In contrast, sometimes the existence of information on the acquisition is offset by the absence of the object itself. The counterpart to the *Musée d'Histoire Naturelle* in Lille is the *Musée Berthoud* in Douai. Its archives are almost totally intact, with minutes of the ethnographic commissions, correspondences, inventories, etc. This documentation even includes very specific artifacts' provenance, identifying some as colonial war trophies. For example, the Kanak club 824 was looted during a punitive expedition in retribution for a revolt against the French army in Pouébo, New Caledonia.[92] The inventory specifies that the object had been used to kill French soldiers. However, the museum itself was bombed August 11, 1944, and most of the artifacts from the *Musée Berthoud* (including 1122 from the Pacific area) are presumed to have been destroyed[93], making any repatriation impossible. Still, the provenance research in Douai might help other museums to document their collections, as donors and collectors were often connected to several institutions.

Even with extensive provenance research, some information will never be retrieved and for some artifacts, it may be impossible to trace them back to their original indigenous communities. If provenance research can in some instances provide data on looted artifacts or, more broadly, on the general context of the acquisition, many artifacts remain and will remain largely undocumented. Which raises the question of how such artifacts should be treated. Should their acquisition be deemed legitimate by default? Or, on the contrary, should they be considered for restitution as the legitimacy of their presence in western museums cannot be attested? These questions are at the forefront of provenance research.

Moreover, if data on the acquisition is already rare, the absence of indigenous perspectives in the archives is glaring. Museum collections documentation is mainly composed of collecting instructions, inventories, and classifications: colonial tools that were used to organize the world through a western lens.[94] Considering that these documents emanated from colonial entities, indigenous points of view are therefore almost invisible. Even in the notes of the collectors, if they still exist, the makers of the artifacts are almost never mentioned, rendering them completely invisible. The lack of written indigenous perspectives can be helped by oral traditions, hence the necessity for collaborations with the societies that produced the artifacts. Such a partnership exists for only one of the institutions from the corpus:[95] the *Château-Musée* in Boulogne-Sur-Mer has been working with the *Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository* in Kodiak, Alaska, since 2006.[96] Yet, to be able to set up partnerships with indigenous communities, they need to

91 The archaeologist Adolph Bandelier accused Pinart of thefts in Magdalena (Galligallard, 2014: 127); the naturalist William Healey Dall also criticizes Pinart for looting Alaskian caves (Dall, 1875a: 199); Lafontaine also testifies that Pinart was confronted by villagers on Makatea island for stealing "one or two bags" of skulls (Lafontaine, 2006: 267).

92 One of the catalogs records that the Kanak club 824 was taken in the context of a punitive expedition sanctioning a revolt against the French army in Pouébo (Saussol, 1979).

93 Some of the artifacts were discovered during this research calling into question the theory of a complete destruction of the collections.

94 Phillips, 2011; Gibson, 2020; Turner, 2020.

95 The museums are usually not opposed to such partnersh cial resources to pursue this type of project.

96 Salabelle et al., 2018.

be aware of the existence of the collections in the museums. However, most of the artifacts studied were kept in museum storage. Only the *Château-Musée* exhibits several artifacts from the Pacific collections. The majority of the collections are also not available online: filling this gap in collaboration with indigenous communities would allow them to have, at the very least, remote access to the artifacts data, enabling repatriation requests.

In the end, this research made me question what constitutes a ground for repatriation: should it only be considered for artifacts with an illegitimate provenance? Because these might not be the ones that indigenous communities might be interested in. It could be suggested that restitution cases should not only be understood in the context of an illegitimate provenance, but more importantly, through the lens of the artifact itself. The way the artifacts were acquired might not be as crucial as the current heritage situation in these communities: can we legitimize the fact that former colonies' heritage would be mainly in the custody of western museums? For instance, when researchers from the *Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute* in Oujé-Bougoumou found out that one of the last remaining traditional hoods was kept in the *Musée de Lachine* in Montréal, they applied for its restitution. Their request was granted, despite the lack of information on how the artifact ended up there. In this instance, the museum did not consider the way the hood came to enter their collection but rather the fact that no traditional hood was present in the traditional territory.[97] This scarcity/rarity criterion could be applied to artifacts with no documentation. Provenance research is an essential component of collection management and should be done as much as possible, if only to contextualize the artifacts on display. However, the argument some museums have brought forward, namely that no repatriation can be considered before provenance research has been completed, may be rooted in a very neo-colonial perspective. By considering provenance research as a precondition to repatriation, museums may risk perpetuating colonial biases, which can already be perceived in some repatriation arguments.[98] Based on this research, we can conclude that the idea that provenance research is a necessary step of the repatriation process is biased. Archival research may provide some useful context when considering restitution, but even when there is information to be found, it is at best insufficient and, at worst, reinforces colonial power imbalances. Establishing contact with the indigenous communities and hearing their voices might be more important than perusing the archives.

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97 https://www.macleans.ca/culture/canadas-museums-are-slowly-starting-to-return-indigenous-artifacts/ Retrieved 28-02-2022.

98 *Ibid.* For instance, some museums require conservation conditions fitting their standard as a precondition to repatriation

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The Archive of Wilhelm Joest and the Limits of Provenance Research

Carl Deußen

Wilhelm Joest (1852-1897) was a collector to the core. Even before he became a professional ethnographer, he already collected crate after crate of artefacts, curios, and specimen. When he finally followed his idol Adolf Bastian and made his passion into a career, his collecting fervour only increased. Joest became the ultimate embodiment of the *Forschungseisender*, a traveller-scientist who visited almost every region on the planet to collect, by any means necessary. When Joest died aged 45 during a collecting trip in today's Solomon Islands, he had donated a collection to almost all major ethnographic museums in Germany. His biggest legacy, however, became the museum that his sister Adele Rautenstrauch built to house his extensive private collection, the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in his natal city of Cologne. Joest not only collected frenetically, he also published a considerable number of books and articles.[99] Museum archives all over Germany hold letters that he wrote to their former directors, asking questions or offering objects in exchange for royal decorations. And yet maybe the most remarkable source he left behind are his diaries which he kept throughout his life and which offer a surprisingly honest description of what he thought he was doing when assembling his collection. Taken together, these materials form something like a Joestian archive, situated at the heart of late 19th century ethnographic collecting.

Within the context of contemporary debates about the decolonisation of ethnographic museums, such a detailed archive appears as a particularly fruitful opportunity for provenance research. The goal would be to reconstruct the origins of the many artefacts Joest collected and to identify potential instances of imperial violence, which may in turn indicate a need for repatriation. Compared with many other collectors, the wealth of archival information that Joest left behind may allow for a close investigation of his life and collecting activity. The objects he collected appear at various points throughout these sources, in pictures, individual descriptions and expenditure lists. It seems that, given this archival background, establishing the provenance of the objects that remain in ethnographic museums today should be a relatively easy and straight-forward task. As it turns out, however, this is not the case. Instead, as I will argue, Joest's archive and collection highlight some of the possible limitations of provenance research when it comes to 19th century collectors.

Precisely because Joest's collection is so well-documented and yet yields almost no useful information on its precise origins, it calls into doubt any overly optimistic expectations of what provenance research can achieve. The case suggests that a surplus of archival material will not necessarily generate actionable knowledges for the decolonisation of museums or the restitution of artefacts. Instead, the temptation to 'find' empirical knowledge in the archive might obfuscate rather than emphasising imperial continuities. As Ann Stoler has warned, an excessive focus on the archival traces of imperial domination might risk "rendering colonial remnants as pale filigrees, benign overlays with barely detectable presence rather than deep pressure points of generative possibilities or violent and violating absences."[100] Hence my tentative argument goes against imagining provenance research as a quick and reassuringly fact-based panacea for all imperial problems plaguing the museum.

99 See, for example, Wilhelm Joest, *Welt-Fahrten: Beiträge Zur Länder- Und Völkerkunde, Erster Band* (*Berlin:* A. Asher, 1895); *Wilhelm Joest, Tätowiren, Narbenzeichnen Und Körperbemalen: Ein Beitrag Zur Vergleichenden Ethnologie* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1887); Wilhelm Joest, *Ethnographisches Und Verwandtes Aus Guayana* (Leiden: P. W. M. Trap, 1893); Wilhelm Joest, Um Afrika (Köln: M. Dumont-Schauberg, 1885).

100 Stoler, Duress: *Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 5.

Instead, new and additional forms of confronting the imperial violence inherent to ethnographic collections might be needed, some of which I suggest at the end of this essay. First, however, I indicate some concrete areas where provenance research's ideal of archival access encounters the complicated structure of anthropology's 19th century archive.

The first problem that arises is the sheer mass of objects in Joest's collection. Today, 5237 objects with a single inventory number remain that can be attributed to Joest, and some more that were collected by Joest but have since been lost. Joest does writes about his collecting, but he still does not address every single artefact specifically. Often, his entries read more like this example from Istanbul, where he simply writes "Bought silver works".[101] There are various objects in his collection today that can be identified as Ottoman silver works, but there is no way to determine whether these are the ones he was referring to in this instance. Potentially, a close analysis of the objects themselves by an expert with regional experience could reveal some of the connections between specific moments of purchase and present-day objects, but to use such an approach for most of the 5237 objects seems clearly out of proportion. And even with such expertise, many of the artefacts still could not be identified, which leads me to my second point: the aim of the documentation.

Like his mentor Adolf Bastian, Wilhelm Joest believed in an empirical inductive approach when it came to artefacts: these objects in their material form held all the information required to understand their creators. Glenn Penny has described Bastian's ethnographic museum essentially as a laboratory where such material sources could be compared and their intrinsic truth revealed.[102] However, Penny also shows that this gargantuan project – comparing the artefacts of all illiterate peoples in the world – was doomed to fail from the beginning. Yet while Joest was collecting, Bastian was still convinced of its feasibility and, accordingly, the agenda was to collect as much as possible before artefacts became "spoiled" by European influence. Under this salvage paradigm, careful documentation was simply not a priority. The skill of the ethnographic collector was to identify relevant specimen while in the field and bring them to the metropole, not to produce extensive documentation. Joest's descriptions of his collecting acts are never geared towards identifying or describing specific objects, as all relevant information was in the materiality of the object itself. There are inventories that Joest wrote for organisational purposes – the objects had to be registered after all – but these lists, while they can often be linked to contemporary inventories, do seldom include information that would allow connecting the descriptions of collecting experiences to specific objects. Joest's collection is both vast and vaguely documented, and both characteristics make it almost impossible to clearly identify specific object provenances.

Yet even if this was possible, there is another barrier. Because while the diaries are often unclear when it comes to the description of specific artefacts, they are very clear about Joest's collecting methods. They show that collecting often meant the acquisition of objects from intermediaries. This group included, on the one hand, vendors who had specialised in "curios" and were catering specifically to the growing number of travellers interested in non-European artefacts. On the other hand, they were colonial local actors who collected for Joest. For example, in a letter to Bastian, Joest describes the following occurrence: "I deposited 100 $ each at the Korean border, then in Nikolawsk (Giljaken) + Xaborowka (Golden) + must wait for the result."[103] As Joest's goal was to collect as

101 Diary 19, 1891-06-11, p. 123. The diaries remain unpublished but can be accessed via the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum. All translations by the author.

102 Glenn Penny, Objects of Culture: *Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), chap. 5.

103 Letter from Joest to Bastian, 1881-09-03.

much as he could as fast as possible, he rarely stayed longer in one place than a few days. In-depth collecting was impossible within such a short time frame and hence the use of local dealers was the most convenient manner to quickly gain a substantial collection. If such a dealer was not available, the alternative was to work with other trusted locals by commissioning them to collect for Joest and send him the collections at a later point. Thanks to his extensive network, this was often possible even though he travelled mostly outside German colonial space. This form of collecting, while convenient for Joest, makes it nearly impossible to identify the original provenance or mode of acquisition of artefacts. Because while it is clear that Joest paid money for them in a relatively equal form of exchange, it remains unclear how Joest's intermediaries gained access to them. And because Joest rarely mentions the names of these intermediaries, further research would be equally difficult and time intensive.

There are exceptions: objects that Joest describes in his published articles come with much more information and can often be clearly linked to specific objects in contemporary collections. For example, there is a snuff box in Joest's collection at the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich about which he writes "It can be proven that this belonged to King Panda, the father of Ketchwayo. cf. my "All Around Africa" p. 146. Panda gave this snuff box to a Mr Gardner in Verulam. Unicum."[104] In *All Around Africa*, Joest describes how he went to visit Zulu king Cetshwayo, how he arrived only after the king had died, how he lied about his identity to be able to see the body, and how he received the snuff box as a gift from Cetshwayo's family – a clearly established provenance.[105]

However, there are some indicators that the truthfulness of Joest's published account is questionable. Consider, for example, the following story he writes at another point about the grave of Zulu king Shaka: "One dark night, because the Sulu are already quite independent here, I went digging for hidden treasures and really did find a skull and several bones, although I certainly don't want to claim that they came from the old Tchaka."[106] Joest already hedges his anecdote by dismissing the possibility that these could indeed by Shaka's bones. But he still paints himself as a daring collector willing to risk his life to acquire rare skulls for the anthropological collection of Rudolf Virchow. However, there is no mention of this incident in the diary, where all of Joest's published descriptions usually have at least a short equivalent. And under closer scrutiny, the story seems increasingly unlikely – the desire of White collectors for skulls was widely known in South Africa in 1883 and it should have been impossible for Joest to clandestinely open the grave of the most revered Zulu leader and rob it without any repercussions by the "quite independent" Zulu. In this light, anecdotes like Joest's visit to Cetshwayo have to be regarded, at least, with caution. There was much competition among collectors in the late 19th century and exaggerating the origin of one's objects (or human remains) by linking them to famous figures effectively increased their value. And while this example only refers to Joest, the fact that his strategy was successful indicates that it might have been more than a personal predilection. Especially in published sources, the goal of ethnographic collectors might not always have been to provide truthful description of provenance.

Joest's lacking trustworthiness also points towards a deeper-lying problem that goes beyond the cases in which he was actively distorting his experiences. One could of course go over every one of Joest's provenance descriptions and ask in how far they could be trusted. With a critical eye, context clues could be identified that indicate whether or not a description is credible. Yet even in those cases where

104 Historical Inventory, Museum Fünf Kontinente.
105 Joest, *Um Afrika*, 190–94.
106 Wilhelm Joest, "Reise in Afrika Im Jahre 1883," *Zeitschrift Für Anthropologie, Ethnologie Und Urgeschichte*, 1885, chap. 11.

Joest can be trusted, a more fundamental problem remains: it is still only Joest's perspective we take into account, the perspective of the White imperial actor, and even if he thought that his description was truthful, his perception might have been completely mistaken. Kurt Ebeling, referring to the work of Stoler, has pointed towards this theoretical problem: provenance research is based on imperial archives that are marred by gaps and occlusions, and by the selective memory of an exploitative ideology. And, he continues,

> there is not only the archive, its content and its gaps, what is said and what is kept silent - the colonial situation confronts us with a much more radical situation that needs to be thought of today: and that is the absence of archives; with the situation that in one place, the place of the event even, there is no record and no archive at all - which does not mean that nothing happened here, but which only means that it was not recorded in this way, archived, institutionalised.[107]

This theoretical uneasiness with too simple an understanding of what an archive is and does extends to my work with Joest's personal archive. Often, all I would want is for one of the persons Joest describes to raise their own voice, to speak their own truth, but this is impossible. And what about all those people that Joest collected from and who never made it into his documentation? Joest has produced thousands of pages of diary, yet all are written from his own perspective, an imperial perspective at that. Identifying the provenance of his collections raises a hard question: How much worth has this one perspective when it comes to reconstructing the necessarily multi-perspectival encounters that led to the acquisition of artefacts?

These are the problems I encountered in determining the provenance of the relatively well-document collection of Wilhelm Joest. I think that these problems apply not only to this one collection but are problems of archive-based provenance research in general, especially since very few collections have been documented as thoroughly as Joest's. What are the consequences? First, I think we have to be more realistic in our expectations regarding provenance research. While the origin of some objects will become clearer, the majority will probably remain shrouded in ambiguity. This means that we should refrain from presenting provenance research as the panacea for the imperial entanglements of museum collections. Right now, German ethnographic museums, which have been chronically underfunded for decades, suddenly can access extensive sums of money for provenance research, which creates a strong incentive for a kind of research that might eventually remain without the results it promises and distract from the many interesting questions that could be explored with these sources and collections instead. Politically, there is also the danger that provenance research becomes or is perceived to become a smoke screen that delays or thwarts efforts for restitution, as Kwame Opoku has recently highlighted.[108] Provenance research alone will not decolonise the ethnographic museum, and potentially it will drain energy from research projects that might be more expedient towards this goal.

What would be alternatives to the provenance research approach? The first could be to write a more general history of ethnographic collecting that investigates structures rather than the origins of individual objects. Because

107 Kurt Ebeling, "Mal d'archives Revisited, Oder Archivübel Aus Postkolonialer Perspektive. Eine Sichtbehinderung," Decolonising Collections - Networking towards Relationality, 2019, https://boasblogs.org/de/dcntr/mal-darchives-revisited/.

108 Kwame Opoku, "Will Provenance Research Delay Restitution of Looted African Artefacts?," Decolonising Collections - Networking towards Relationality, 2021, https://boasblogs.org/dcntr/will-provenance-research-delay-restitution/.

while the archive of Wilhelm Joest does not provide too many answers regarding where his artefacts precisely originated, it does allow for a pretty good understanding of how ethnographic collecting functioned, both in the field and the metropole. It shows that while Joest mostly bought his objects legally, he was always willing to steal them if he could. It shows how he utilised the discourse of science to legitimise his actions and how he framed his expropriation of indigenous peoples as an act of preservation. And it shows the complex system of renumeration through prestige, decorations and positions that was in place in Germany to fuel the global collecting frenzy.[109] These insights provide a good historiographic foundation for moving the discussion on restitution away from a legalistic object-by-object approach towards questions of ethics and cultural politics. It is unnecessary to determine the provenance of every single object to say where they *should be displayed* today, given that they were acquired under the general injustice of colonial occupation. Secondly, it might be interesting to move the focus from *how* objects were collected to *why* this was done. In their extensive materiality, ethnographic collections sometimes seem self-explanatory, but they actually pose a series of questions regarding the motivations behind the amassing of hundreds of thousands of objects belonging to supposedly uncivilised peoples. The reference to the salvage paradigm in 19th century ethnography certainly provides one answer, but only relying on this one explanation makes for a rather superficial reading of the motives of collectors. A new approach might highlight agendas and desires that are not so different from current European identities. Such reflections point towards imperial continuities that still define contemporary museum practise, such as the absence of discussions of White identities in a space that was arguably created to define and stabilise these very identities. This may be a provocative question, but certainly worth asking, highlighting the need for more far-reaching debates that could be had beyond the scope of provenance research.

109 Carl Deußen, "'To Give Away My Collection for Free Would Be Nonsense' – Decorations and the Emergence of Ethnology in Imperial Germany," in *Material Culture in Transit - Theory and Practice*, ed. Zainabu Jallo (London: Routledge, 2022).

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Museum Collections, Archives, Repositories. Moroccan History in a Peripheral Ethnological Collection in Germany

Amir Theilhaber

As Brian M. Watson recently argued, the "archive [should not] refer to, well, just about anything".[110] Apart from muddying the waters, confusing what an actual archive is and what the people working there – archivists – do, distinction of terms is important for the emerging re-engagement with ethnological museum collections in the context of provenance research. These ethnological collections should be considered as alternative repositories for historical research that can enrich scholarly debates with heretofore often ignored perspectives.

Collections are collected by collectors. Who are they? Why and for what do they collect? How are these collections acquired by museums? Museums maintain depots and archives and are managed by individuals who are never merely a derivative of the structures they move in, but actors who have choices and make decisions. Furthermore, museums curate and exhibit primarily objects, thus relaying images and messages of their own holdings with different target audiences and purposes in mind. The transmission of a world view or the staging of an irritant to an epistemology – e.g. imperial, national, regional, religious or secular – as a way of educating or discussing with a mostly educated bourgeois population in mind is a central part of what museums have been doing. Depending on where museums are located, they are frequented by international tourists and more or less diverse urban visitors, or by a more circumscribed audience. In contrast to such object collections, archives serve the purpose, as Pomian no tes, to "secure, collect, classify, conserve, preserve and make accessible documents that have lost their prior functionality and have thus been deemed superfluous by administrations, but continue to be worth conservation."[111]

Between archive and museum, different modes of engagement are employed, and different goals are pursued. In investigating the provenances of its ethnological collections, the current provenance research project at the *Lippisches Landesmuseum* seeks to think together different thought systems and research approaches. There is the object in its materiality, which has its own object history, from its production, use, allocation, and staging; its appropriation by the collector as a purchased or looted good, gifts, barter object, etc.; its way into the museum; its use and interpretation and re-embedding in the German periphery of Lippe, restorations and ultimately up to our involvement as investigators with it today. The object exists in connection with museum documentation and ideally with a concrete collector, his/her professional career, intention, and the political, socio-economic context of the act of collecting. External sources located in varying archives and libraries, the comparison of these sources with ethnological and other secondary resources and, significantly, the discussion with scholars and other people from the objects' places of origin form an additional frame of documentation and allow for further academic interpretation – and societal discussion.

Archives, museum collections, libraries, and other repositories of written and material sources and testimonies of the past, should be understood as institutions with their own goals and orientations but interrogated and analysed together. Moving beyond the traditionally text-based approach to the study of modern history by focussing on material collections in their entanglements promises opening interdisciplinary modes of engagements between history, art history, museology, and cultural stu-

110 B. M. Watson. Please Stop Calling Things Archives. An Archivist's Plea. *Perspectives on History* 22 January 2021.

111 Krzystof Pomian. *Der Ursprung des Museums. Vom Sammeln*. Gustav Roßler, Berlin, 2013, 16.

dies. For the study of history, but also for other disciplines, this should spark new approaches and research questions. By bringing together these different repositories and thought systems, a new body of knowledge emerges that has until now not existed in this form. Clarity of terms is required to systematise this flood of approaches and materials into theoretical and methodological frameworks and to detect the cracks through which the "subaltern speaks" and the agency of the colonised can become apparent.[112]

The ethnological collections of the *Lippisches Landesmuseum* in Detmold, close to Bielefeld in central Germany, originate in all continents: From Peru, Mexico, the USA, South Africa, Cameroon, Togo, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Egypt, Morocco, Romania, Syria, Iran, India, China, Japan, Indonesia, and Samoa. Overall, there are approximately 3000 objects in the ethnological collection. The museum dates to 1835 and was established by a scientific association of Lippe's upper classes. Like the natural sciences and archaeological collections of the museum, the ethnological collection stems almost entirely from donations of members of Lippe's bourgeoisie. With the integration of Lippe into the German Empire after 1871 and the growing ease of travel across the world by steam ship and railway, more and more objects were brought back to Lippe by "its sons and daughters", who had spent months or years as merchants, travellers, missionaries, colonial administrators, soldiers, or diplomats in different countries, more or less under the control or domination of European empires. In 1919, the *Lippisches Landesmuseum* became a state institution but remained largely a museum of Lippe's bourgeoise.[113]

Image 1-2: Moroccan display at the Lippisches Landesmuseum today. © Amir Theilhaber, CC-BY-ND.

The Moroccan display at the *Lippisches Landesmuseum* today consists of two adjacent display cases. They exhibit a magnificent green-gol-

112 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg, Urbana 1988, 271-313.

113 Stefan Wiesekopsieker, "Lippe im Kaiserreich", In *Lippische Geschichte, Band 1*, Heide Barmeyer, Hermann Niebuhr, Michael Zelle, Petersberg 2019, 180–217; Matthias Rickling, *175 Jahre in 175 Tagen. Lippisches Landesmuseum Detmold. Katalog zur Jubiläumsausstellung des Lippischen Landesmuseums Detmold. 17 Juni 2010 bis 16. Januar 2011*, Detmold, 2010; Inventar des Landesmuseums 1921, Lippisches Landesmuseum Archiv (LLM-A); Museumsinventar 1893–1934 LLM-A.

den saddle and several ceramics, metallic and wooden household items of average artistic-material value. Opposite is a display of objects from all over Africa, mostly from Cameroon. The exhibition dates from 1994 and follows a room of displays of cultural objects from across Asia, presented loosely around themes such as consumer goods, entertainment, and weapons. The largest exhibition area charts pre-Colombian cultures of Peru and another room shows objects from Central America. The ethnological exhibition is located at the top floor of the main building and introduced by cabinets dedicated to four of the collectors who donated their collections to the museum: August Kirchhof, Alfred Zintgraff, Otto Rosenkranz and Friedrich Rosen. The cabinets are accompanied by short texts describing their lives, and a longer excerpt of a German travel diary of Ethiopia that takes issue with the German-European condescension towards non-European cultures. The objects from Morocco and other regions around the world are exhibited without any detailed engagement with their provenances, what their usages were before they were collected, why they were collected, by whom and under what circumstances. How the objects made their way into the museum and how they were portrayed for people in Lippe in the past is equally absent. The presentation broadly portrays extra-European cultures through artefacts without further historical contextualisation.

An in-depth analysis of the objects, based on a wide array of sources, breaks this view of seemingly self-contained and stable "exotic" cultures. In the arrangement of the Moroccan display cases, a richly ornamented, colourful wall shelf is a central element of display. The Moroccan objects were given to the museum by the Orientalist scholar and diplomat Friedrich Rosen (1856-1935). The ceramics and metallic objects were collected by Friedrich Rosen's wife Nina, who was a British born artist and, like Rosen, well-versed in Persian and Arabic. In their nearly twenty years of diplomatic residence in countries then considered "Oriental" in Germany, the Rosens were particularly interested in the cultural productions of "the common people", as they perceived this to be a central element for the "organic" development of the countries they lived in. As Friedrich Rosen posited in the introduction to a translation of Jalal ed-Din Rumi's *Mathnawi* in 1913, European intervention was mostly detrimental for the development of these countries.[114]

Image 3: Photo of the "Rosen room" in the Lippisches Landesmuseum in 1932. Raisuli's wall shelf on the left. Photographer: Herbert Müller-Werth.

Before the 1980s, the ethnological collection had not been on display since 1940. During the 1920s and the 1930s, the ethnological collections took up a significant place in the overall museum exhibition, with five rooms and several staircases showing the diverse collection. Due to a lack of space, only single objects had been

114 Zugangsheft Friedrich Rosen 1921, LLM-A; Amir Theilhaber, „Kat.-Nr. 20. Fayence-Schüssel. Fes, Marokko, 19./frühes 20. Jahrhundert". *Geschichte der Dinge. Zur Herkunft der Objekte in Nordrhein-Westfälischen Sammlungen*, LWL-Museumsamt für Westfalen, Münster, 2020, 186-187; Georg Rosen, Friedrich Rosen. *Mesnevi oder Doppelverse des Scheich Mewlānā Dschelāl ed dīn Rūmi*. Munich, 1913, 1-30.

displayed before the 1920s. In 1921, just before Rosen became German foreign minister, he had given a collection of about 300 objects from all over "the Orient" to the museum as a permanent lease. The museum put them on display in full in one room, commonly known as the "Rosen room". Some of the artefacts on display today can also be found in photographs of the exhibition from the 1930s. Among them is the colourful wall shelf on display in the museum today. Museum documentation provides origin and part of the circumstances of its change of ownership. It was a "Wall shelf, from the country house of Raisuli" and part of the "objects, which were plundered by the troops of the Moroccan sultan during a punitive expedition against the rebel Raisuli and then brought to Tangier." Rosen purchased the wallshelf at the market in Tangier, as a souvenir oa man with whom he had entertained professional relations as German envoy to Morocco.[115]

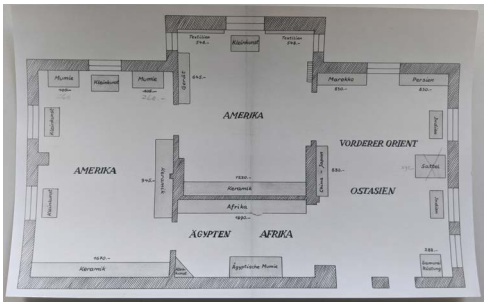
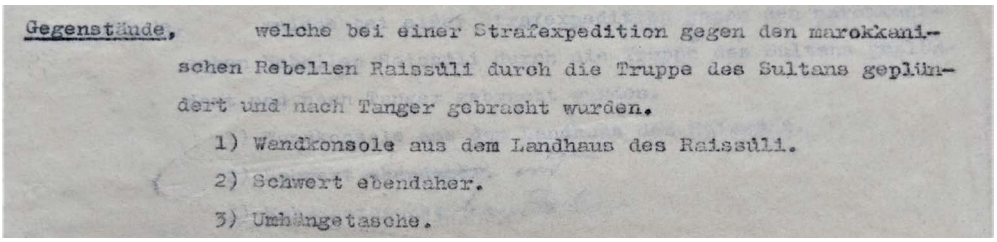


Image 4: Museum map of the 1920s and 1930s. Raisuli's wall shelf in the "Marokko" display in the "Vorderer Orient" room. LLM-A.

The colourfully ornamented wooden shelf had been in the possession of Mulay Ahmed er-Raisuli (1871-1925), who was a powerful governor of the province around Tangier. In Europe and the US, the governor was widely known simply as the bandit Raisuli. Rosen entertained good relations with Raisuli as German envoy to Morocco from 1905 onwards, despite such contacts being frowned upon by other Europeans in Morocco, particularly the French: "Soon I learned to my great surprise that in Tangier the legend circulated that the country's inland was beset by horrific turmoil and that the 'bandit' Raisuli had carried out dreadful atrocities [...] Raisuli was, of course, a governor, and he conducted his rule, by the way, in exemplary fashion. The complaints that were levelled against him were not so much rooted in real grievances but in European politics."[116]

German policy in Morocco was to prevent or delay the French-Spanish takeover of the country and to upset the Franco-British entente cordiale that had been signed in 1904. German policy aligned with the goals of the Moroccan government and various actors across the country – including Raisuli. Moroccan court officials saw in the Germans, who had repeatedly proclaimed an Islamophilic foreign policy, a way to shore up their power. The magnificent green saddle – exhibited in the museum in the adjacent vitrine – was a diplomatic gift the Moroccan Sultan Mulay 'Abd al-'Aziz IV (1880-1943) presented to Rosen as part of the Moroccan courts attempts to leverage German power in


Gegenstände, welche bei einer Strafexpedition gegen den marokkanischen Rebellen Raissüli durch die Truppe des Sultans geplündert und nach Tanger gebracht wurden.

1) Wandkonsole aus dem Landhaus des Raissüli.
2) Schwert ebendaher.
3) Umhängetasche.

Image 5: Museum documentation of Raisuli's wall bracket, © Amir Theilhaber, CC-BY-ND.

115 Museumskarte 1920s-1930s, LLM-A; Zugangsheft Friedrich Rosen 1921, LLM-A.

116 Friedrich Rosen, *Aus einem diplomatischen Wanderleben. Auswärtiges Amt. Marokkokrise*. Berlin, 1931, 301.

its favour. When the French threatened to land a military policing mission to establish order and subdue what the European press scandalised as widespread banditry, Rosen counselled the Moroccan court to set up a police mission itself to remove governor Raisuli and prevent losing its policing monopoly to the French. Moroccan troops chased Raisuli from his castle in the mountains near Tangier and plundered his belongings. Part of the plunder landed on the market in Tangier, where Rosen purchased the wooden shelf, which is now on display in Detmold.[117]

The supposed chaos in Morocco, indicative of what was in Europe often conceived of as Oriental backwardness and fanaticism, was used as a pretence by the French and Spanish to press for a policing mission in Morocco to fulfil their "mission civilisatrice" in late 1906, which would severely undermine Moroccan sovereignty.[118] "When you are declared brigand chief by the European powers, there is little you can do about it",[119] was Rosen's summary to a local journalist from Bielefeld, Herbert Müller-Werth, after a joint visit of the Landesmuseum in 1932 and a viewing of the Moroccan objects on display.

In German government files Raisuli and the Moroccan sultanate at large were viewed a lot more positively: "Wilhelm II fancied Raisuli to be a Moroccan Götz von Berlichingen, a Franconian knight who gained fame for his battles and poetry in the German Peasants' War in the sixteenth century and popularised in the late eighteenth century by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as a free-spirited national figure, transcending the feudal system, fighting for the poor and generally sticking it to the man."[120] But it was not only that Germany "toyed" with Morocco. Germany's repetitive Islamophilic messaging in the wake of Wilhelm II's visit to Salah ed-Din's grave in Damascus in 1898, where in an act of identification with the Ayyubid sultan, he declared himself "loyal friend in all times" of 300 million Muslims worldwide, led a number of Muslim-majority countries to seek out Germany as a potential political partner.[121] As such, both Raisuli and the Moroccan sultan Mulay 'Abd al-'Aziz IV tried to leverage German power against France.

Raisuli's wall shelf and Mulay 'Abd al-'Aziz IV's green saddle are part of the larger history of what Kris Manjapra describes as follows: "In the Wilhelmine and Weimar era, Germans sought to inscribe themselves on the world, not only through formal imperialism, but also through more informal alliances with the anti-colonial activists within rival empires, often through cultural diplomacy and the contribution of 'soft weapons', such as military methods and German science. During the same period, coloured nationalists, including African Americans, Turks, Persians, Indians, Japanese, Chinese and others, perceived in German-speaking Europe an alternative centre of world power, indust-

117 Friedrich Rosen to Bernhard von Bülow, 27 November 1906, A 20342, R 15493, Politisches Archiv – Auswärtiges Amt (PA AA); Friedrich Rosen to German Foreign Ministry, 19 December 1906, A 21103, R 15493, PA AA; "Anarchy in Morocco. France and Spain to Send War Ships to Protect their Subjects", *Washington Post*, 27 October 1906; "Flotterment et indecision", Dépêche Marocaine, 4 November 1906; Amir Theilhaber, Friedrich Rosen. Orientalist Scholarship and International Politics, Berlin, 2020, 233-250.

118 Edmund Burke III, "Mouvement sociaux et mouvement de resistance au Maroc: La grande Siba de la Chaouia (1903–1907)," *Hespéris-Tamuda* 17 (1976/1977): 149–63; Pascal R. Venier, "French Imperialism and Pre-Colonial Rebellions in Eastern Morocco, 1903–1910," *Journal of North African Studies* 2, no. 2 (1997): 57–58.

119 Herbert Müller-Werth, Report 17 July 1932, 2 NL Müller-Werth 1199/34. Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden.

120 Theilhaber, *Friedrich Rosen*, 237.

121 Sabine Mangold-Will "Die Orientreise Wilhelms II.: Archäologie und die Legitimierung einer hohenzollernschen Universalmonarchie zwischen Orient und Okzident." In *Wilhelm II. Archäologie und Politik um 1900*, Thorsten Beigel, Sabine Mangold-Will, Stuttgart, 2017, 58-60; John C. G. Röhl, Wilhelm II. Der Aufbau der persönlichen Monarchie, Munich, 1059; Norman Rich, *Great Power Diplomacy, 1814-1914*, Boston, 1992, 339; Bernhard von Bülow, Imperial *Germany*, New York, 1915, 100-101.

rial strength and theoretical science that could help leverage resistance to western European global hegemony […]."[122]

While this characterisation and the Moroccan objects do not represent all ethnological collections at the *Lippisches Landesmuseum*, by reading together various sources from different repositories, it is possible to expand the view on ethnological collections, the way they have been and continue to be displayed, and how they can unfurl new potential for interdisciplinary research and societal debate – also with regards to how such objects in peripheral regions of Germany and beyond can be made more accessible, and where and how they should be put on display in the future. As such, ethnological objects that so far often stand in for supposedly exotic cultures or cultural practices are transformed into historical objects that can be studied and analysed from different vantage points as part of a history of entanglements.

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122 Kris Manjapra, "Reflections. Transnational approaches to global history: a view from the study of German-Indian entanglement." *German History* 32, no. 2 (2014), 292-293.

"Sensitivity" at Work – A Double-Edged Sword

Rainer Hatoum

The concept of "cultural sensitivity" has emerged as a central, though ambivalent one in my archival work of the past twenty years. This work has been characterized for the most part by different collaborative research projects with several Indigenous communities in North America. In the United States, socio-political changes led to the passing of laws such as the Indian Religious Freedom Act and the Native Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1979 and 1990. While NAGPRA is quite specific as to which museum objects are to be considered for repatriation,[123] it also led to the emergence of a general notion that collections do potentially contain "culturally sensitive" materials to be returned to Native communities after consultation. Eventually, this concept spread to other archival institutions as well.

A signal concept for institutional decolonization efforts, "cultural sensitivity" proves to be a gateway for the reintroduction of essentializing notions of race, culture, and knowledge, which prevail in Indigenous discourses. As these notions are in many ways problematic, this new situation calls for thorough reflection. Therefore, I would like to elaborate on different aspects of the working of the notion of "culturally sensitive materials" in the following. I will focus on personal experiences from previous research projects involving a collection of Navajo ceremonial songs and the field notes of Franz Boas. To these, I will add some observations from my current work as head of the anthropological collections at the Brunswick Municipal Museum.

Culturally Sensitive Archival Material

I first encountered the notion of "cultural sensitivity" in an archival setting in connection with my work on a wax-cylinder collection of ceremonial songs of the Navajo at the Berlin Phonogram Archive.[124] While I knew that the recorded songs were "culturally sensitive," which is why I had envisioned my project as a collaborative endeavor in the first place, I had not expected to run into any "sensitivity-related" issues in connection with the associated archival documents. Thereby, my work on the recordings already took the topic of "sensitive materials," usually treated in connection with tangible museum objects, a step further, i.e., to intangible cultural expressions.

While researching these ceremonial songs, I found out that several archives with collections important for my work had recently signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) or reached similar, more informal agreements with the Navajo Nation. Even though I never learned the exact wording of these agreements, they obviously affected all Navajo-related resources and were mainly concerned with the future of dealing with "culturally sensitive" materials. It was also apparent that the meaning of that concept had not been clearly defined. In a particularly graphic case, I was informed by the representative of a university archive that all Navajo materials were potentially sensitive as all aspects of their life were accompanied by rituals. The bottom line was that I was asked to first get permission from the Navajo Nation before I could view the Navajo-related archives of several of the institutions I approached.

However, getting such permission was and is by no means a mere bureaucratic formality but actually an extremely time-intensive and arduous process. In my case, it played out

123 It lists human remains, funerary objects, such of cultural patrimony, and sacred objects of particular cultural significance.

124 I undertook this work as part of the larger project "From Imperial Museum to Communication Center?" (2006-2009), which had been co-founded by Susan Kamel, Lidia Guzy and myself and which had been funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

the following way: While I eventually received the official approval from the Navajo Nation to work with Navajo ceremonial practitioners on that particular Berlin collection of ceremonial songs, other archival institutions would still not accept this permit as it did not specifically include the name of their particular institution. As getting clearance to work on the wax-cylinder collection had already taken over a year and a half out of my three-year funded project, these regulations effectively blocked my access to these sources, causing the project results to fall short of what I had originally envisioned, also concerning provenance research.

To contextualize this case, a few more details need to be included to reflect on the rationale of the Navajo Nation and situate its position in the proper historical context. It is essential to realize that my experience has to be seen in the context of the general protective measures taken by the Navajo Nation, which is one of the most researched Indigenous communities in North America. As part of a marked policy aimed at regaining self-determination as a tribal nation since the late 1960s, they have adopted measures to bring about intellectual decolonization. This resulted, among other things, in a set of guidelines relating to the Navajo Nation's understanding of collaborative research. These guidelines were not only to ensure that the interests of the Navajo Nation were on an equal footing with those of non-Navajo scientists and scholars intending to conduct research on the Navajo reservation but also self-consciously granted Navajo concerns priority.[125] When evaluating projects presented to them, this might result in a new assessment of the proposal. In my case, it turned out that my initiative, purposefully designed as a collaborative endeavor aimed at establishing official relations with Navajo Nation that would grant them a say in matters of the Berlin collection, ended being categorized as "research" on the part of the Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department. One of the reasons for this decision was my request for guidance regarding a more nuanced dealing with the collection, which had come under the UNESCO protective label *Memory of the World* as part of the larger wax-cylinder collection of the Berlin Phonogram Archive in 1999. As far as the Navajo Nation was concerned, the collection had no place in Berlin in the first place, let alone as a German contribution to the heritage of mankind. So, I was asked to submit a research proposal. Over the course of writing this proposal, the following questions turned out to be fundamental: What part did Navajos play in defining the actual research problem? How is this study relevant to the Navajo? What is the specific benefit to the Navajo Nation?[126]

The Navajo Nation's official definition of research to which I was referred to then was the "Navajo Nation Human Research Code" of 1995, which served as basis for evaluating my research proposals. It became clear that I had to take special care in defining the intended scientific methodology and the intended products of the work, i.e., to be acquired research data. Thereby, the question of ownership of the data to be generated was crucial and was defined as follows:

> Research is the use of systematic methods (including, but not limited to note taking, interviewing, video and audio taping) to gather and analyze information for the purpose of proving or disproving a hypothesis, concepts or practices, or otherwise adding to knowledge and insights in a particular discipline. […] All data […] are the property of the Navajo Nation […].[127]

The Research Code's definition of the term "publication" speaks of the intent to regain control over everything said and written about the Navajo. In this context, the stipulation of advanced approval of papers and publications seems to me to be particularly problematic:

125 Navajo Nation 1995.

126 Hatoum 2009, 2010, 2015.

127 Navajo Nation 2002: 296.

> As used in this Code, the term ›publication‹ includes all proposed professional and program papers and reports concerning Navajo individuals. Also requiring advance approval are papers based on research conducted within the territorial jurisdiction of the Navajo Nation, prepared for presentation at national or international professional society meetings by researchers.[128]

These very thoughts and claims were influencing the archival institution's decisions and reactions when I approached them with my desire to view their Navajo archival materials. Therefore, in hindsight, it is not surprising that the different archival institutions I approached received my requests somewhat cautiously.

Potentially Culturally Sensitive Archival Material

While my work on the Navajo collection had given me a good understanding of the working of the concept of "cultural sensitivity" based on **bilateral agreements** between individual tribal nations and archival institutions, I also came to experience it in the context of another institution's proactive decolonizing measures. That encounter emerged from another research endeavor of mine, which began in 2007 with the U'mista database project[129] that aimed at documenting the Kwakwaka'wakw collection at the Ethnology Museum in Berlin. This initiative resulted in me becoming part of the still running critical edition of Franz Boas' pathbreaking monograph "The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl."[130] The project aims at drawing together archival materials resulting from over 40 years of Boas' Northwest Coast research distributed over twelve museums and archival institutions across two continents. It features a strong digital aspect that also pays heed to native ontologies.[131]

Since German language resources are one of my areas of expertise, I eventually addressed the issue of Boas' not yet deciphered shorthand notes. As these were predominant in his field notes, this task soon became fundamental, also concerning provenance research. In facing and eventually successfully tackling this challenge, I had to consider the whole of Boas' shorthand field notes as a body.[132] Yet content-wise, these notes are not limited to the Kwakwaka'wak but also relate to many other Indigenous communities as well. And so, diving into this wealth

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128 Ditto

129 A team representing the U'mista Cultural Center in Alert Bay, BC, including anthropologist Aaron Glass and cultural expert William Wasden Jr., spent five weeks in Berlin in 2007, digitizing the collection. Yet much work followed in translating the related German documents into English.

130 The project (http://www.bgc.bard.edu/research/projects-and-collaborations/projects/the-distributed.html) was conceptualized and is coordinated by Aaron Glass (Bard Graduate Center, New York) and Judith Berman (University of Victoria, BC). They are joined on the core research and editorial team by anthropologists Rainer Hatoum (formerly Goethe-University, Frankfurt a. M., now Brunswick Municipal Museum) and Ira Jacknis (University of California, Berkeley); artists and community researchers Corrine Hunt (of the Kwagu'l First Nation, Vancouver, BC) and Andy Everson (of the K'omoks and Kwagu'l First Nations, Comox, BC); technical architect Barbara Taranto (Tel Aviv); and project administrator Zahava Friedman-Stadler (New York). Formal research relationships and collaborative protocols have been established with the U'mista Cultural Centre (Alert Bay, BC), Kwakiutl Band Council (Fort Rupert, BC), Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nations (Port Hardy, BC), and Quatsino Band Council (Coal Harbour, BC). Participating institutions include American Folklife Center, Library of Congress; American Museum of Natural History; American Philosophical Society; Archive of Traditional Music, University of Indiana at Bloomington; Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv; Columbia University Libraries; Ethnologisches Museum Berlin; The Field Museum; National Anthropological Archive, Smithsonian Institution; National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution; and University of British Columbia Press. Major support has been provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the School for Advanced Research, and Bard Graduate Center.

131 Glass, Berman, and Hatoum 2017.

132 Hatoum 2014.

of archival materials became the focus of two more Boas research projects of mine.[133]

It was in this context that issues of "cultural sensitivity" reappeared rather unexpectedly, as none of the notes I worked on struck me as particularly "sensitive." While I was working on their transcription, general policies changed at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, the institution that houses most of Boas' papers. This change was marked by the introduction of "Protocols for the Treatment of Indigenous Materials" in 2014.[134] These revealed the institution's concern for a respectful and collaborative future dealing with Indigenous communities associated with their archival resources and focus on "culturally sensitive materials." The protocols feature an extensive definition of that term, yet a very broad one. Ultimately, they point to the individual Indigenous communities for designating the specifics while reserving the final decision, in conflicting cases, to the APS.

One of the protocol's stipulations became relevant for my project: the point that all materials not yet cleared as "non-sensitive" by the affected tribes would be considered "potentially culturally sensitive." As I was the first to transcribe and translate the Boas field notes, they squarely fit into this category. In contrast to my experiences with the Navajo case, where institutions required clearance before I even had a chance to glance at their materials, the APS protocols do allow scholars to view and work with their collections not specifically identified as "sensitive materials," even those not yet cleared. The APS only asks for approval by the affected communities or, in less substantial cases, by the APS's Native American Advisory Board, before using such notes in publications. That is a notable difference and makes the APS's protocols, generally speaking, a reasonable model. Still, they can pose a real challenge, as in my case, when materials relate to many different native communities, especially as it is up to the scholar who first intends to publish a particular set of materials to obtain that approval.

One should note that the developments at the APS are by no means a singular phenomenon. Instead, they express a more general trend that translates Indigenous and more general demands for the decolonization of Western scientific institutions into reality. In the North American Indigenous context, these ideas were first expressed concerning education and the sciences. With regard to archival institutions, these demands first impacted museums[135] and then moved on to other archival formats in the narrower sense. In the latter context, they first emerged in the form of demands and policies such as expressed in the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials that the Library of Congress first introduced in 2006. In these, the following is suggested:

> Examine assumptions about established library and archives practices which directly contradict Native American principles and practices. – At the request of a Native American community, avoid artificially prolonging the life cycle of sensitive documentary material. Some items, such as a photograph of a sacred ceremony, or object, or culturally sensitive documentation of a burial should not be preserved forever or may need to be restricted or repatriated to the culturally affiliated group.[136]

On the national level, the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums was founded in 2010. Ever since, it has become central

133 The first, *The Work and Impact of Franz Boas as Reflected in his Shorthand Records (2015-2017), was funded by the DFG, the second, Transcription and Translation of Franz Boas's Kwakwaka'wakw Shorthand Field Notes for a Critical Edition of His 1897 Monograph (2018-2019)*, was funded by the NEH (National Endowment for the Humanities). See Hatoum 2017, 2018, forthcoming, and Ritchie and Hatoum 2020.

134 See APS Protocols, https://www.amphilsoc.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/attachments/APS%20Protocols.pdf

135 E.g., Hatoum 2009, 2010.

136 FAC 2007: 8.

to spreading the concept of "cultural sensitivity" to archival institutions. At first, institutions in areas with high Indigenous population densities, notably New Mexico and Arizona, and with particularly active and vocal tribal nations, such as the Navajo Nation, spearheaded the trend. Eventually, it also affected institutions further away and has now become accepted on a national level. The developments at the APS, one of the oldest and most prestigious research archives in the United States, have to be seen against this backdrop. Due to the importance of the "Protocols for the Treatment of Indigenous Materials" in my case, I would like to present here summaries of the two central terms "Indigenous material" and "culturally sensitive materials." As to the first term, the following definition is given:

> "Indigenous materials" means any photograph, drawing, book, manuscript (including items associate with manuscript collections such as wax seals and awards), research or any other type of printed material (whether bound or not), recordings (audio and video), art, graphics (such as maps and illustrations), microfilm and digital material, that documents or relates to the culture and language of native communities indigenous to the Americas. APS does not collect native artifacts and therefore the term "indigenous materials," as used in these Protocols, does not include artifacts.[137]

This definition declares basically any archival document or material touching on American Indian subjects or groups as "Indigenous materials." Thereby, a clear distinction is made between Indigenous "artifacts" (as collected by museums) and "archival materials," which is the subject matter of the APS's collection. Against the backdrop of this understanding, the following definition is given for "culturally sensitive" materials:

> Materials that are "culturally sensitive" means any indigenous material that depicts a tribal spiritual or religious place (e.g., kiva or Midewiwin map), object (e.g., Iroquois masks), belief or activity (e.g., Cherokee sacred formulae). A spiritual or religious activity may include prayers, ceremonies, burials, songs, dancing, healings, and medicine rituals. The definition "culturally sensitive" may include any other definition provided in writing by a specific tribe with respect to any indigenous materials held by APS depicting that tribe's culture or from which the materials originate. APS will then determine whether the tribe's definition falls within the spirit of the definition set forth herein.[138]

As the APS turns to the respective Indigenous communities for specifying their understanding of what shall be taken as "culturally sensitive," it is also important to include the APS's understanding of whom it recognizes as legitimate Indigenous tribal representative:

> "Tribe" means the official governing body of a tribe, typically made up of a Tribal Council and its elected or appointed Chief, President, Governor, Chairman or other person who serves as the head of the Executive Branch [...] delegated authority by a tribe to deal with tribal cultural matters. [...] Where a tribe has divided or separated into more than one tribal Band, Community, Confederation or Nation from where the material originated or were collected or whose culture is depicted in the materials, [...] has defined the materials as "culturally sensitive, APS will defer to the decision of that tribal Band, Community, Confederation, or Nation. For the purpose of the Protocols, the term "tribe" refers to the tribe where the materials originate or were collected or whose culture is depicted in the materials.[139]

This definition is central, as it reminds us of the complexities behind the seemingly simple notion to just ask "the source community" on critical issues.

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137 American Philosophical Society 2014: 414.

138 American Philosophical Society 2014: 415.

139 ditto.

"Sensitivity" – A Concept Develops a Life and Logic of Its Own

In my current work as head of the anthropological collections at the Brunswick Municipal Museum, I have realized how much "sensitivity" as a concept, which only a few years back had not been a factor except for an object's conservation status, has gained all-present importance.[140] The way such a concept works outside a specific cross-cultural dialogical context is particularly noteworthy. Often, an exhibition curator ends up pondering what to do with a certain object that *could potentially be* "sensitive" when presented in a native context or collaboration with representatives of the "source community," even if such context is not given. How should the Tjurunga at the Brunswick museum be treated, for example, an item of religious significance to the Central Australian Aranda, which had been "collected" in an undocumented way by the German missionary Carl Strehlow in the early 20th century? It is known that such objects fall into the category "secret-sacred" in Australia, the most critical of five distinguished object groups differentiated there. At the same time, however, there is no direct contact with the Aranda, no specific demand for the object's return, and no cooperation likely in the near future. So, what could or should be done with such an object?

While today hardly anyone would question the decision not to put such a Tjurunga on display, other issue come to the front. Is it, for example, acceptable to present the associated object card, and if so, how, as it depicts part of that particular Tjurunga's sacred design? Here, opinion greatly diverges as to whether one should expand the notion of "cultural sensitivity" to such an extent. While the general notion would suggest turning to "the source community" on such matters, anyone working in a museum context knows that such collaborations are the exception rather than the norm for various reasons. As a consequence, curators are on their own in most cases. So, what should be done: risk criticism or drop the matter?

The Two Edges of the Sword

The three case studies I briefly introduced represent three different ways of spreading and applying the concept of "cultural sensitivity":

- First, by active initiative on the part of individual tribal nations, i.e., through **bilateral agreements**,
- Secondly, by means of institutions' **proactive initiatives** to decolonize their working methods, and
- Thirdly, by the unfolding of the concept on an **individual level** based on more or less knowledgeable self-assessments.

While I acknowledge that these measures, which I support myself, have to be seen in their historical context, I increasingly have second thoughts about them, as they raise some fundamental theoretical and practical questions, especially in the case of archival materials.
As for the practical aspects, take, for example, Boas' micro-note shown in Image 1:

I Group. Washingt[on].

[The] MawiL *is in the middle of the house*}, in 2/3 *of the length of the house. The* Awik'Enox *have their* MawiL *on the right upon entering*[/i.e., of the entry]. *The* MawiL *is always draped with* Laqaq. *When the* hamatsa *comes out the whole thing shakes and the* Laqoq *sways. The* 2 heligya *stand on each side, the* 4 *whistle carriers* [stand] *vis-à-vis of the* mawiL *and all look at the* hamats'a, *the* Kyingqalala *stands by them and sings.* [The] Heligya *have blankets and lether aprons on.* [They wear] *no rings around ankle and wrist. The hamatsa had very long hair*, [somewhat] *shorter to the sholder. The*

140 And then, while I only focus on issues of "cultural sensitivity" here, "historically sensitive objects" constitute yet another category in the German context. It designates objects that have been produced or acquired under questionable circumstances (e.g., Leitfaden 2021:19).

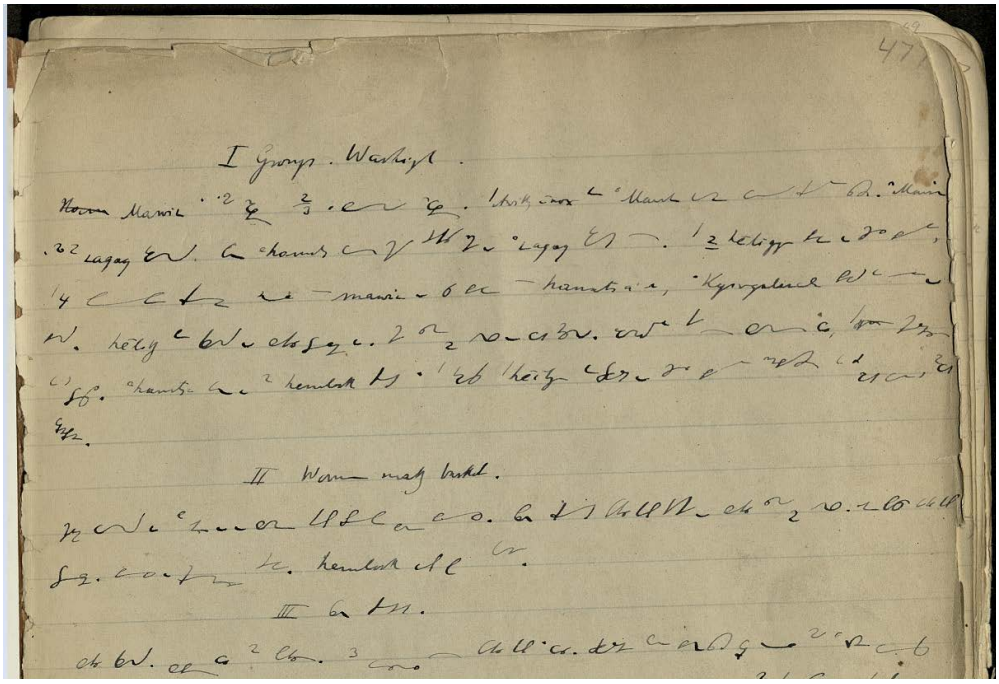

Image 1: Stenographic notes on the Hamats'a diorama (ACLS, W1a.10/6:477, American Philosophical Society).

> hamatsa[,] *when he dances with* hemlock[,] *is not painted*[.] *The* heiligya *were* [painted] *black on each side of the face up to the oral cavity*, [the paint had been] *smeared downwards with* [the] *hand.*[141]

Apart from the fact that hardly anyone would be able to read this note if not transcribed and translated in the first place, only very few readers would realize that it refers to a core object of the hamats'a, the highest-ranking secret society of the Kwakwaka'wakw. Actually, the case is much more complex, but one would only know this after conducting even more research. Only then would one realize that this is not just some random field note but one that Boas took while preparing his most famous museum diorama for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington (see Image 4). For its production, at one point, Boas even posed as a hamats'a emerging from the sacred chamber (see Image 3). Even more research would show that Boas' main inspiration did not come from an observed ritual but rather from a show-highlight performed at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 that features that moment, as Image 2 attests. Now, who is going to reflect and decide in a case like this whether such a note is more "native "or "non-native "in authorship or whether it is "culturally sensitive" or not? And then, this is just one of thousands of other notes—some shorter, others longer—that touch on all kinds of subjects. So, in reality, one would not be able to just work with one historic preservation officer or cultural expert. Rather, one would need to elicit the support of large groups of elders, who, rightfully, would have to get paid for their services, given their willingness and effort to sit down with you and reach a decision on a given topic.

Concerning theoretical matters, this example reminds us that especially field notes are typically cross-cultural documents with varying degrees of multiple, yet still primarily,

141 APS W1a10.6: 477.

Image 2: Hamats'a dancers of the Kwakwaka'wakw at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago. Photo John H. Grabill [?], 1893 (AMNH neg. no. 338326).

Image 3: Franz Boas posing as a Hamats'a dancer for the preparation of a diorama (The Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History, No. 8304).

Image 4: Boas' diorama „Hamats'a Coming out of a Secret Room" at the NMNH (The Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History, INV 09070500).

non-native authorships, and therefore quite different from museum objects of undisputed Indigenous origin. Although I do agree that the treatment of archival documents, too, needs the inclusion of Indigenous voices, perspectives, and concerns, I also see the current discourses in which the concept of "culturally sensitive materials" is embedded, i.e., the broader context. And so, aside from the mentioned practical considerations, there are other issues to be considered in connection with the notion of decolonization by getting clearance from "source communities" or rather a representative individual or group of persons acting on their behalf. While this is meant as a sign of respect for Indigenous communities by dealing directly with their officially designated bodies, with which I have no issue, I still wonder whether they are the right counterparts for discussions on and decision-making on matters of "cultural sensitivity." The fact is that there never was nor is a unified opinion to be found on any issue, not even regarding ceremonial songs among the Navajo. And so, it has to be noted that tribal government representatives, such as in our own society, assume temporary functions for the tribal nations. Therefore, their decisions cannot be taken as a timeless statement of a certain truth. Instead, these are fleeting expressions of complex political debates and discourses. This holds true even more so when it comes to local discussions on matters of "cultural sensitivity." I wonder how we would feel if our multi-faceted academic discourses were muted when foreign academics were asked to deal only with a designated German governmental office to receive "the German take" on particular issues and act on this in the future.

While "cultural sensitivity" has emerged as a signal concept in institutional decolonization efforts, as a means of showing respect for Indigenous worldviews and as a starting point for engaging native communities, the concept does not have the same importance from a native point of view. And so, while it featured centrally at the APS in connection with Boas'

field notes, it was only one of many aspects – and not necessarily even the most important one – when it came to the collection of ceremonial songs of the Navajo in Berlin. Here, matters of "sovereignty", "self-determination," and "cultural re-appropriation" were at least as important, if not more, just as the notion of "regaining control" and "recovering stolen knowledge."

In the associated Indigenous discourses, essentializing notions of race, knowledge, and culture, in the sense that "culture" and "cultural knowledge" is quite literally tied to "blood," are central. While I recognize the fundamental importance of "tradition "or "traditional knowledge" for native self-definition, many associated concepts and assumptions make me feel highly uneasy when taken for themselves, for manifold reasons. For one, they are troublesome against the backdrop of German history. They also correlate with some of the essentialist views of early anthropologists. But the most unsettling point is the realization that the concept of "cultural sensitivity" might serve as a venue for these notions to regain normality in academic discourses.

Even though individual institutional responses differ, as shown, there is a certain tendency toward the more restrictive out of lack of knowledge and the resulting fear of doing something wrong or being culturally disrespectful. And here lies the danger of glossing the rather alarming and categorizing term "sensitive" over specific materials tied to culturally complex and dynamic discourses that strictly call for a case-to-case approach. For these reasons, I am ambivalent about the introduction, and the current institutionalization of the concept of "cultural sensitivity" and have come to consider it a double-edged sword.

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"Behind every treasure the Chinese Government had sent to the exhibition they had all the good will of the Chinese nation".

Archives Research on Chinese Government's Preparation for the 1935 Royal Academy International Exhibition of Chinese Art

Lu Zhang

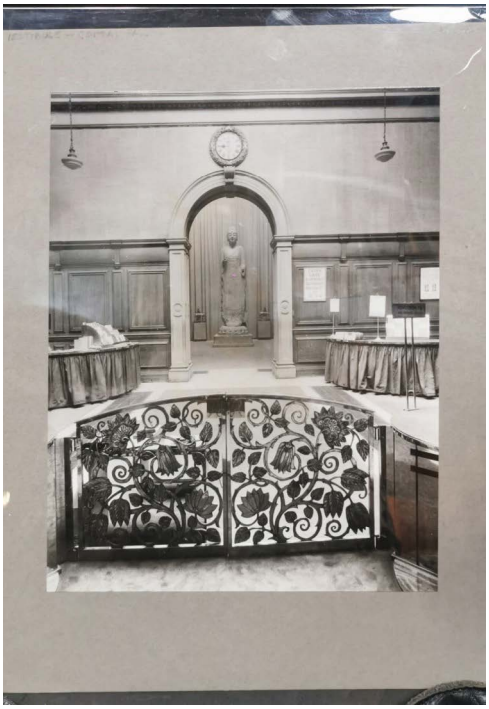

Image 1: Welcome to the 1935 International Exhibition of Chinese Art. Entrance to the exhibition, with the view of the six-meter-tall statue of the Amitabha Buddha, dated 585 A.D., on loan from the Paris-based Chinese art dealer Lu Qinzhai (aka C.T. Loo 芦芹斋). In the foreground, there is the vestibule executed in Firth-Vickers Stainless Steel which was a legacy from the RA's 1934 British Art Exhibition. Behind it is the catalogue selling stand. © RA Archives.

After over one year's preparation and negotiation between Britain and China, and the involvement of other international partners, the International Exhibition of Chinese Art (hereinafter 1935 Exhibition) was held at Burlington House, London, from 28 November 1935 to 6 March 1936.[142] (Image 1) As "one of a sequence of national art shows" at the Royal Academy of Arts (hereinafter RA), 3,078 Chinese artworks of all genres lent by 246 public and private collections from fifteen countries were displayed together under one roof for nearly four months, which made it the largest cultural event of its kind ever mounted.[143] The exhibition was well received in Britain and internationally and made a profit.[144] As the RA's annual report shows, nearly 420,000 visitors saw this exhibition, including many nobilities and celebrities from all over the world, including the King and

142 My archival research trip to the Royal Academy of Arts is funded by the 2021-22 University of Nottingham Asian Research Institute PRG Funding. I thank Archivist Mr. Mark Pomeroy from the Royal Academy for introducing me to the valuable materials and photographs regarding the exhibition. I also thank my supervisors Dr. Ting Chang and Dr. Isobel Elstob for their advice on this paper and their generous support and help throughout my PhD journey.

143 The exhibition history of foreign national art at the RA began in 1920 with Spanish Painting. After that, the Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art in 1927, the Exhibition of Dutch Art in 1929, the Exhibition of Italian Art in 1930, the Exhibition of Persian Art in 1931, the Exhibition of French Art in 1932, and the 1935 Exhibition of Chinese Art. For the international lenders of the exhibition, see "Index of Lenders", *Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Chinese Art* 1935-36, 3rd Edition. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1935), xxvii-xxxv.

144 According to the Royal Academy's *Annual Report*, there were 401,768 paying visitors and 2,531 season tickets were sold for the 1935 Exhibition. The increase in the number of visitors and the figure of 420,000 visitors by the end of the exhibition were continuously reported by newspapers, too. Annual Report for the Council of the *Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians and Associates for the Year* 1936, (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1937), 23, 40. Also see Jason Steuber, "The Exhibition of Chinese Art at Burlington House, London, 1935-36", *The Burlington Magazine*, 148 (1241), (London: The Burlington House Publications, 2006), 528; Ilaria Scaglia, "The Aesthetics of Internationalism: Culture and Politics on Display at the 1935-1936 International Exhibition of Chinese Art", *Journal of World History*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 105.

Queen of Britain, the Crown Prince of Sweden, Chinese Ambassador to Britain Guo Taiqi (郭泰祺, aka Quo Tai-chi), Special Commissioner of the Government of China Dr Zheng Tianxi (郑天锡, aka F. T. Cheng), etc.[145] Consequently, the 1935 Exhibition demonstrated Britain's network with the world, pushed the China fashion in the West to its climax, "raised an unprecedented degree of interest in Chinese art and culture" that lasted for decades, became a benchmark for evaluating succeeding exhibitions of Chinese art, and eventually revolutionised Chinese art history as an intellectual discipline.[146]

More importantly, the 1935 Exhibition enjoyed remarkable significance for China as the first time that Chinese national treasures were sent overseas and the first time that the Chinese Government sponsored an exhibition outside China. The exhibition consisted of 1,022 artworks, including 735 from the National Palace Museum (故宫博物院, hereinafter NPM), accounting for one third of total exhibits, carefully selected and sent by the Chinese Government. They embodied the finest level of Chinese civilisation and showed the Chinese Government's willingness to collaborate with other countries via the allure of national culture. Moreover, the Exhibition, along with other cultural and artistic activities of the same period, could be understood as a kind of "manifesto" for the modernisation and westernisation of the Republic of China, causing strong sensation in the West.

Scholarly interest for the 1935 Exhibition has grown internationally in the last fifteen years, revolving around the artistic, historical, cultural, political, national and international dimensions of the event.[147] Drawing on my archival research and applying a transcultural textual and visual analysis approach, my paper explores the endeavour made by the Chinese Committee and Chinese government for the preparation of the exhibition, collaborating with their British counterparts and connecting China to the world. There are two main topics in my study: the political engagement and the mobility of the artworks from China during and after the 1935 Exhibition. The former is to understand the networking and the cultural diplomacy of China in the overlapping context of the 1930s. Studying Chinese art collections and exhibitions outside China illuminates the fascinating history of the international engagement with China and Chinese objects, which developed over time in different ways. The display strategies at the museums and the cultural policies reflect the national power and politics of China domestically and internationally. Secondly, the transportation of the artworks to London was a complicated process, causing chaotic debate and patriotic sentiments among Chinese intellectuals concerning the conservation and repatriation of Chinese cultural relics.

The archives regarding the 1935 Exhibition are extensive and located internationally. Primarily, the RA published *The Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Chinese Art* and the *Illustrated Supplement* in 1935 and reprinted it several times in 1936. The catalogues contain the exhibition map, all lots of exhibits and their photographs (small-scale). The Chinese government also commissioned the Commercial Press in Shanghai to publish the four-volume bilingual *Illustrated Catalogue of Chinese Government Exhibits for the International Exhibition of Chinese Art in London* (参加伦敦中国艺术国际展览会出品说明) – bronzes, porcelain, painting and calligraphy, and miscellaneous. The exquisite cloth-covered catalogue is writ-

145 Reports about celebrities and famous groups visiting the exhibition were published in newspapers, including *The Times and Daily Telegraph*. Romanization of Chinese names in this paper are spelt in Pinyin, followed by the original Chinese and another version in brackets, if applicable.

146 Steuber, 2006, 536. Scaglia, 2016, 106.

147 See Steuber, 2006, 528-36; Ellen Huang, "There and Back Again: Material Objects at the First International Exhibition of Chinese Art in Shanghai, London, and Nanjing, 1935–1936," in *Collecting China: The World, China, and a History of Collecting*, ed. Vimalin Rujivacharakul (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 138–152; Scaglia, 2016, 103-37.

Image 2-3: Working with archives in the RA Library. Photographs by the author.

ten in English and Chinese, introducing Chinese art history and connoisseurship and the artworks displayed in the Shanghai Pre-Exhibition from 8 April to 5 May.

The archives kept in the RA Library include (1) manuscripts of meeting minutes of the Exhibition Committee from December 1934 to March 1936; (2) the annual report of the RA; (3) five volumes of press cuttings concerning the Exhibition between 1935 and 1939 from Britain, China, and other European countries, all in the respective languages, but none in Chinese; (4) ten folders of official and legal documents, correspondence and telegraphs among the Committee members in Britain and China, and letters from visitors to the exhibition and their replies; (5) two albums of photographs showing the packaging, transporting and installing of the artworks, the gallery views of the Exhibition, and (6) some albums of photographs of individual exhibits (Image 2).[148]

On the Chinese side, the archivist from the Second Historical Archives of China in Nanjing, Liu Nannan (刘楠楠), compiled the official documents and correspondence regarding the

148 According to the estimate made by the Assistant of the Exhibition, George Spendlove, the number of photographs required for the *Illustrated Supplement* to the exhibition was 2,500. *International Exhibition of Chinese Art, 1935-36 Publication Committee Meeting Minutes*, 7 October, 1935. Royal Academy of Arts Archives, London.

1935 Exhibition between the Chinese Preparatory Committee and the Chinese Government, which provides a Chinese perspective on the exhibition's organisation and administration and the cooperation with its British partner.[149] In 1985, Basil Gray, former keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities of the British Museum and member of the Oriental Ceramics Society (hereinafter OCS), delivered a speech at the OCS for the fiftieth anniversary of the exhibition as the only living committee member of the 1935 Exhibition by that time. He reviewed the detailed process of the exhibition, the contribution of the OCS to the exhibition, and the significance of the exhibition in promoting and shaping Chinese art in the West. What is more, memoirs by the actors in the 1935 Exhibition, such as Zheng Tianxi, Na Zhiliang (那志良), Zhuang Shangyan (庄尚严), and Fu Zhenlun (傅振伦), provide personal accounts and intimate interpretations of the event and historical contexts.

Firstly, the 1935 Exhibition was much anticipated for China. In the 1930s, China experienced some westernisation and the enlightenment of nationalism.[150] China's international status had improved to some extent since China had been an ally in WWI. However, it was still a subject to Western imperialism and suffered setbacks from the overlapping conflicts among the Nationalist government (Kuomintang), the Communist Party, remaining warlords, and Japan after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Confronting the chaos of the early twentieth century, the young Republic of China adopted the new cultural diplomacy to seize upon culture of the old Chinese civilisation to humanise Chinese in the West, seeking for opportunities to demonstrate the world the new face of China.

Under the idea of "aesthetic education" promoted by Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培), the first Minister of Education, the Chinese museum industry flourished as soon as the Republic was founded.[151] On 10 October 1925, the fourteenth National Day of the Republic of China, the NPM was established at the site of the former imperial palace. The responsibilities of the NPM included the management, preservation, exhibition, and research of the former imperial collections. Under the threat of the Japanese invasion, the museum collection was evacuated and moved to Shanghai from 1931 to 1933.[152]

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149 Liu Nanan, "Selected Archives of the National Palace Museum in Peiping for the International Exhibition of Chinese Art in London (北平故宫博物院参加伦敦中国艺术国际博览会史料选辑)', *Republican Archives* (民国档案), March 2010, 6-14.

150 Along with the invasion of the Western powers and the push of domestic reformists, the Chinese modernisation of industry and infrastructure construction in China started in the late nineteenth century and accelerated after the fall of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of the Republican of China in 1911. With the intensification of domestic and international conflicts of China and the entry of Western ideas, Chinese intellectuals began to preach nationalism, evolving from "anti-Manchus" to "anti-national imperialism". The concept of "nationalism" (*minzu zhuyi,* 民族主义) was firstly proposed by the Chinese revolutionist Liang Qichao (梁启超, 1873 - 1929). In Liang's New Citizens (新民说), he advocated that China needed to implement nationalism to resist the national imperialism of the Western powers in order to save the country, and only by enlightening the Chinese people to become "new citizens" could nationalism be implemented. In 1919, the New Cultural Movement started among Chinese intellectuals and students, aiming to criticise classical Chinese ideas and promote westernised new lifestyle and a modified Chinese culture based upon progressive, modern and western ideals, especially democracy ("Mr De", 德先生) and science ("Mr Sai", 赛先生). See Liang Qichao, New Citizens, (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1916).

151 The Preliminary Office of the National History Museum (today's National Museum of China) was founded in 1912, tasked to safeguard China's larger historical legacy. From them, museums were built in Chinese major cities. See Wang Hongjun (王宏钧), "The Founding of the Museum Industry and the Initial Development of the Republican Period in China (中国博物馆事业的创世和民国时期的初步发展)", *Chinese Cultural Heritage* (中国文化遗产), Issue 4, 2005, 8-14.

152 For the evacuation of the National Palace Museum collections from Beijing to Shanghai, see Du Enlong, "How the Cultural Relics from the National Palace Museum were Moved to Taiwan (故宫文物精华是怎样被迁往台湾的)", Corpus of Party History (党史

When French sinologist Paul Pelliot heard this news, he, who failed to examine the Museum collection due to the outbreak of Sino-Japan War, suggested the British Government to invite China to send the collection to England for exhibition so that Western scholars and collectors could see the treasures.[153]

On the other hand, despite the xenophobic views towards China so prevalent in early-twentieth-century Europe, there were still groups of collectors and academics promoting Chinese art.[154] The idea of having a comprehensive exhibition of Chinese art in Britain to promote the international appropriation of it emerged as early as 1932, proposed by a group of advanced British collectors of Chinese art. Among them were the British collector Sir Percival David who worked in the NPM as a consultant for porcelain from Song to Ming in 1928. He travelled to China in 1932 and determined to "bring to London some of the very pieces he had helped to put on display in the Forbidden City, as well as those from the many other countries so eager to participate".[155]

The formal discussion of the exhibition started in 1934.[156] In June, Ambassador Guo Taiqi proposed to have an exhibition of Chinese art at the RA, "for which the Chinese government had already privately agreed to loan work".[157] The reasons to do so, according to Guo, were "to foster Sino-British relations, exchange two cultures, promote art and celebrate the anniversary of the coronation of the King".[158] Four months later, this idea was refined by Minister of Education, Wang Shijie (王世杰, aka Wang Shih-chieh) in a report enclosed to an official letter to the Executive Yuan of the Chinese government. As he stated, inspired by the financial and diplomatic success of the Exhibition of Italian Art, Chinese authorities held high expectations that this event would demonstrate the grandeur of the Chinese nation to the world and earn support from the West:

> [...] the previous Italian Art Exhibition benefited a lot, so that the previous misunderstandings between Britain and Italy were eliminated, the two countries became friends. The Italian Prime Minister Mussolini had allowed 20,000 pounds to finance the exhibition, but the fund remained unspent until the end of the exhibition and a profit of 37,000 pounds (over

文汇), Issue 1, 1995, 39; Shambaugh Elliot, and David Shambaugh, *The Odyssey of China's Imperial Art Treasure*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2005), 74.

153 *Ta Kung Pao*, 20 January 24th year of of the Republic, Page 3. Also see Wu Sue-Ying (吴淑英), "*China*" *in Exhibition: The 1961 Exhibition 'Chinese Art Treasures' in the USA as an Example* (展览中的 "中国：以1961年中国古艺术品赴美展览为例), Master Dissertation, National Chengchi University, 2002

154 Chinese art exhibitions before 1935 included the 1925 Exhibition of Asian Art in Amsterdam organized by the *Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst* (Society of Friends of Asiatic Art), the 1926 *Ausstellung Asiatische Kunst Köln* (Asian Art Exhibition Cologne), the 1929 Exhibition of Chinese Art in Berlin by the *Gesellschaft für Ostasiatische Kunst* (East Asian Art Society). The increasing scales and impacts of the exhibitions suggest a fast-increasing interest in Asian and specifically Chinese art and archaeology. See Jason Steuber, 2006, 531. At the same time, modern Chinese artists went to Europe to study western art. The first large-scale Chinese modern art exhibition took place in 1933 in Paris. See Stephanie Su, 'Exhibition as Art Historical Space: The 1933 Chinese Art Exhibition in Paris', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 103, 2021, 125-48.

155 "Introduction by Lady David", Rosemary E. Scott, *Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art: A Guide to the Collection*, (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art & School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1989), 12-13.

156 Manuscripts of the meeting minutes of the Selection Committee of the 1935 Exhibition at the RA are dated from 1 November 1934 to 10 March 1936. Eighteen out of twenty-one meetings took place before the exhibition, especially from July to October 1935.

157 Diana Yeh, *The Happy Hsiungs: Performing China and Struggle for Modernity*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), 65.

158 Fu Zhenlun (傅振伦), "The Whole story of the London Chinese Art Exhibition 1 (伦敦中国艺展始末1)", *The Forbidden City* (紫禁城), Issue 1, 2004, 147.

> 700,000 Chinese yuan) was made. This is the first time that the treasures of our national art and culture have been presented on an international scale in Europe. The benefits to China's international perceptions and China-British relations will be great. The author expects that the success of this exhibition will be equal, if not greater, than those of previous exhibitions of European arts.[159]

When China was invited to the 1935 Exhibition, it provided the Chinese government with "an opportunity to demonstrate – and possibly enhance – its authority over China's national treasures".[160] Earlier than the exhibition, the successful 1934 English-language Chinese opera Lady Precious Stream (王宝钏传) by Xiong Shiyi (熊式一, aka Hsiung Shih-I) exemplified the appeal of the remote ancient civilization of China to its western audience.[161] Its success also reinforced the determination of China to hold an exhibition of its national art in London. The preparation of the exhibition was staged by the Government of China to demonstrate its authority over the national treasures, its willingness to participate in international affairs, and its legitimacy to rule the Chinese territory.

The Committee of the 1935 Exhibition was founded at the RA in November 1934 by a group of prominent people from international backgrounds who shared an interest in Chinese art.[162] The Committee was led by the Second Earl of Lytton, who headed the Lytton Commission for the League of Nations to China to investigate the Mukden Incident in 1931-32, producing the Lytton Report which condemned Japanese aggression against China in Manchuria.[163] Five Chinese people were enlisted in the British Committee, including Ambassador Guo Taiqi as one of the Vice-Chairmen and Dr Zheng Tianxi as the Special Commissioner of the Chinese Government.[164] In the same month, the Chinese Preparatory Committee of the 1935 Exhibition was appointed by the Executive Yuan, with Minister of Education Wang Shijie as the executive leader.[165] The responsibilities of the Chinese Committee were to select the artworks that represented the finest artisanship and the best interpretation of Chinese civilisation and to coordinate with the British Committee to materialise the 1935 Exhibition. The Chinese Committee not only represented the authority and importance that the Chinese government attached to this exhibition with several ministers and officials involved and the finest level of intelligence and connoisseurship in Chinese

159 "谓前次意大利艺术展览会获益甚大，使英、意过去之误会根本消除，两国由是亲善。意首相墨索里尼曾准以二万镑为该会经费，惟展览结果该经费迄未动支，并且获利三万七千磅（合我国币七十余万元）。我国艺术文化之精华在欧洲国际大规模表见此为首次，其于国际观念、中英感情获益必大，比之历次欧洲各国之展览，说者预料此次成功倘非过之，亦当相等。" Wang Shijie, Report on the Status of Preparations for the International Exhibition of Chinese Art in London (伦敦中国艺术国际展览会筹画近况报告), dated 3 October 1934. Quoted in Liu, 2010, 7.

160 Scaglia, 2016, 116.

161 *Lady Precious Stream* was premiered in 1934 and ran for three years in London, which made it the longest-running play of the time. For Hsing Shih-I and his career as a playwright and a promoter of Chinese art in the west, see Yeh, 2014.

162 Exhibition of Chinese Art 1935-6 Meeting Minutes, November 1, 1934. Royal Academy of Arts Archives, London. Also see *Catalogue of International Exhibition of Chinese Art*, (London: The Royal Academy of Arts, 1935), viii.

163 Quincy Wright, "The Sino-Japanese Controversy and the League of Nations." The Mukden Incident is generally regarded as the prelude to the Second Sino-Japanese War. By Westel W. Willoughby. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press. 1935. Pp. Xxv, 733)", *American Political Science Review* 29, no. 6 (1935): 1075-76.

164 Other three Chinese members in the British Committee were Counsellor of the Chinese embassy, Chen Weicheng (aka W. C. Chen 陈维城), Hong Kong-based philanthropist and collector Li Rongsen (aka J. S. Lee, 利荣森) and young artist Wang Jiqian (aka C. C. Wang, 王季迁). Ibid. viii.

165 RAA/SEC/24/25/1, Telegram, from Wang Shijie to the Royal Academy, dated 12 December 1934. Also see Wu Sue-Ying (吴淑英), "China" in Exhibition: The 1961 Exhibition Chinese Art Treasures in the USA as an Example (展览中的"中国"：以1961年中国古艺术品赴美展览为例, Master Dissertation, National Chengchi University, 2002, 8-9.

art with prominent art historians, educators and artists, but also demonstrated the "new image of Chinese people" and the connections between China and the world with the majority of the Committee, despite homogenous, had study experiences in foreign countries.

The staffing arrangement put China and Britain on an equal position, which was a great honour for the Chinese government, which had previously been discriminated against in its international relations. A Chinese article attributed this concession by Britain to the considerable expected financial profit of the exhibition.[166] Notwithstanding, both two committees that contained state and non-state, national and transnational actors, "each distinguished by nationality and yet committed to a common goal", collaborated. The exhibition contributed a glamourous celebration of the art and culture of one country in the territory of another.[167] Undoubtedly, without the involvement of both governments, the project could not have become a reality.

Sending national treasures of China to Britain concerned some Chinese intellectuals.[168] Confronting the fierce debates among the Chinese intellectuals about the legitimacy of the exhibition and concerns about the security of the objects going to Britain, the Chinese Committee requested that the exhibition could only be processed if the British party could be responsible for the safety of the artworks throughout the exhibition, a pre-exhibition in Shanghai and post-exhibition in Nanjing should be held to notify the Chinese public, and China should reserve the right not to export artworks of special significance.[169] Finally, the British Committee agreed to pay for the shipment from Shanghai to the exhibition, under the safeguard of the British military. However, to keep the cost down, the artworks from China were not insured.[170]

For the consideration of safety and in order to keep a reference, the Chinese catalogue for the Shanghai pre-exhibition noted the title, author, date, dimensions, the quality, and the provenance (then home museum, but not historical collectors) of each artwork. However, in the British catalogue, the information of quality and provenance is missing, replaced by the names of lenders. Even though some lenders of the 1935 Exhibition were controversial, the documentation on the provenance of the artworks is lacking. The act of provenance checking in the West grew from the experience of WWII and the restoration of looted artifacts. The process was then extended into museum loan procedures and is nowadays standard practice. Another possible reason for the ab-

166 Tao Xiaojun (**陶小军**), "An Examination of the 1935 London Art Exhibition (1935年伦敦艺展之始末考察)", Art Observation (**美术观察**), Issue 20, 2015, 111.

167 Scaglia, 2016, 114-15.

168 The intellectuals who opposed to the opening of the 1935 Exhibition included Zhu Ziqing (朱自清), Liang Sicheng (梁思成), Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿), etc. They published articles on Chinese newspapers such as *Ta Kung Pao* (大公报), *Shun Pao* (申报), and *World Morning Post* (世界日报) to express their outrage. See "Academics Oppose the Exhibition of Antiques to Britain. Three Reasons Listed (学术界反对古物运英展览列举三项理由)", *World Morning Post* (世界日报), 20 January 1935. Xu Wangling ((徐婉玲), "The International Exhibition of Chinese Art in London in 1935 and its Impact (1935年伦敦中国艺术国际展览会始末及其影响)*", China Reading Weekly* (中华读书报), 18 December 2019.

169 For the transportation, "如英国政府对于物品之安全，自起运之地点起能负责充分保障，则可赞同。" Official Letter from the Committee of the National Palace Museum Peiping to the Ministry of Education (**北平故宫博物院理事会致教育部公函稿**), dated 26 May 1934, signed by Cai Yuanpei. Quoted in Liu, 2010, 6. Also see "Memorandum from the Royal Academy to H.E. the Chinese Minister", dated 7 November 1934, signed by Walter Lamb. For the pre- and post- exhibitions, "（一）选送物品运英展览前，应在上海开一预展会，时间拟定明年三月间；物品回国后，并应在南京展览一次，以昭明信。（二）关于特殊重要物品，本会有保留不予出国展览之权。" Letter from the Secretary of the Executive Yuan to the Committee of the National Palace Museum Peiping (行政院秘书处致北平故宫博物院理事会笺函), dated 27 December 1934, signed by Cai Yuanpei. Quoted in Liu, 2010, 9.

170 Letter from the British Committee to Chinese Ambassador, dated 8 June 1934, signed by Geroge Hill, Neill Malcolm, Percival David, George Eumorfopoulos, R. L. Hobson, Oscar Raphal.

sence of the provenance record of the exhibition was that the curators of the great 1930s exhibitions at the RA were not employees of the institution, hence their papers are not part of the archive.

After the pre-exhibition in Shanghai from 8 April to 5 May at the Bank of China on the Bund in Shanghai, the artworks were ready to leave for Britain.[171] They were packed in brocade boxes and bags in an exquisite manner for diplomatic protocol and protection purpose.[172] Then they were sealed in ninety-three steel chests and loaded on the 630-foot-long Country-class heavy cruiser of the Royal Navy, the H.M.S. Suffolk. The transportation was under the guard of British military. The Chinese government appointed Tang Xifen (唐惜芬) from the Ministry of Education and Zhuang Shangyan from the Palace Museum as secretaries accompanying the artworks on board, examining the artworks once every two days.[173] At the same time, four Chinese exhibition assistants from the NPM travelled on another cruise to London: Fu Zhenlun, Niu Deming (牛德明), Na Zhiliang and Song Jilong (宋际隆).

On 25 July 1935, the H.M.S. Suffolk loaded with the Chinese artworks finally arrived at Portsmouth and was warmly welcomed by the local people and the media. (Image 4)[174]

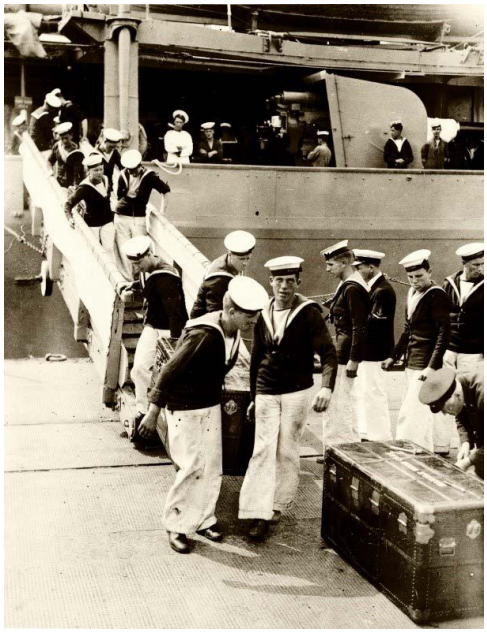

Image 4: The crew of the H.M.S. Suffolk unloads cases at Portsmouth, 25 July 1935. The 1935 Exhibition at the RA. Photographs by an unknown photographer from Topical Press Agency. Courtesy of the RA.

Then the steel chests were handled with care by the British soldiers to four special vans to be transported to London. They were kept at the warehouse of Burlington House "under a close guard", then unpacked by the members of both committees together in September (Image 5).[175] While China used to be a victim of art plundering by the British military in the late nineteenth century, the arrival of the Chinese artworks, with a warship used as a vessel to protect and transport the national treasure of China, marked not only the start of a long celebration of Chinese art in Britain, but more

171 Shanghai Municipal Archives keeps the archives of the Shanghai Pre-Exhibition of the 1935 Exhibition. For a general introduction, see Zhang Yaojun (张姚俊), "The Sensational 1935 Exhibition of National Treasures of the National Palace in Shanghai (1935年轰动上海的故宫国宝珍品展)", *Shanghai Municipal Archives*, retrieved on 5 June 2008, https://www.archives.sh.cn/shjy/shzg/201203/t20120313_6385.html, consulted on 29 March 2022.

172 Director of the National Palace Museum, Ma Heng (马衡) informed the Executive Yuan via telegraph that the artworks for the 1935 Exhibition "must be put in brocade boxes and bags (须装置锦匣、锦囊)". Letter from the Secretariat of the Executive Yuan to the Committee of the National Palace Museum Peiping (行政院秘书处致北平故宫博物院理事会函), dated 25 February 1935, signed by Chu Minyi (褚民谊). Ibid.10.

173 Fu, 2014, 150.

174 The media coverage on the 1935 Exhibition is extremely extensive. In China, *Shenbao* (申报, aka Shun-Pao) reported the exhibition closely. In Britain, RA hired Alleyne Clarice Zander (referred as Mrs Zander in documents) as publicity agent, then a publicity manager from 1934 to 1946, being charge of the publicity and press-cutting archive of the exhibitions held at the RA. See RAA/PC/1/26. 6 March 1934, 26 June 1934, 17 March 1936.

175 "Art Cargo in Warship. Priceless Exhibition from China", *Daily Sketch*, July 22. 1935.

importantly, a new chapter in Sino-British rela tionships that both the Government of China and Britain anticipated. This time, no plunder, no war, only equality and cooperation.

Image 5: Chinese and British staff unpacked the Chinese national treasures for the exhibition, September 1935. From left to right: Walter Lamb, Secretary of the RA; Zhuang Shangyan, secretary accompanying artworks from China; Zheng Tianxi; Percival David; unknown Chinese staff, Chen Weicheng (陈维诚, aka W.C. Chen, counsellor of the Chinese Embassy), Tang Xifen, secretary accompanying artworks from China; Fu Zhenlun, Chinese exhibition assistant. Courtesy of the RA.

On 25 November 1935, the International Exhibition of Chinese Art was finally realised in the galleries of Burlington House. The Chinese government, by using art, this universal language, as a political token, turned this exhibition into a diplomatic occasion. On 3 December 1935, *The Times* published "Chinese Art: Complementary to Europe, A Revelation to Britain". In the report, China's endeavour for this exhibition were recognised, two cultures were connected and compared; moreover, China, as an old civilisation and a young nation, had managed to show its charms on an international stage:

> Behind every treasure the Chinese Government had sent to the exhibition, they had all the good will to the Chinese nation… (The good will is) abundantly reciprocated in the enthusiasm of the British public's response to the manifestation of China's artistic eminence.[176]

If the escort of Chinese artworks by British warships symbolised the end of Western abuse and plunder of China, then the opening of the boxes containing Chinese national treasures by experts from both countries together materialised a new chapter of Sino-British relationship. In this exhibition that embodied Internationalism and celebrated peace and cooperation, the national art of China became a political token in the new Chinese cultural diplomacy that strove hard to promote the new image of China to the world. In the end, exhibiting a venerable and cultured past, it showed that China's new modern identity would emerge from an enlightened civilization "not made with the bayonet, but […] founded upon peace, virtue, and affection."[177]

The splendid 1935 Exhibition of Chinese Art came to an end on 7 March 1936 and became the last exhibition of foreign national art at the RA before WWII.[178] Taking advantage of the Chinese fever created by the 1935 Exhibition, another exhibition of Chinese art was in the City Art Gallery, Manchester on 3 April 1936 for six weeks with some of the exhibits lent to the 1935 Exhibition by British collectors, together with collections from Lancashire and Cheshire. Guo Taiqi and Zheng Tianxi attended the opening ceremony. [179] The gaint buddha (Image. 1) was firstly gifted by Loo to the Government of China, then donated to the *British Museum* via Guo Taiqi as a commemoration of goodwill between China and Britain for the 1935 Exhibition. Nowadays, it is part of the *British Musuem*'s permanent exhibition.

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176 "Chinese Art. Complementary to European. A Revelation to Britain", *The Times*, December 3, 1935.

177 Zheng, Tianxi, *East and West: Episodes in a Sixty Years' Journey*, (London: Hutchinson, 1951).

178 After the 1935 Exhibition, the RA did not have an exhibition of foreign art until the Exhibition of Art from India and Pakistan in 1947-48.

179 "His Excellency Comes North", *Manchester Evening News*, 3 April 1936.

Image 6: The National Palace Museum treasure fleeing Japanese forces in Southwest China, 1938.

However, the course of the Chinese national treasures had not come to an end. The Chinese government loan returned to China on 1 June 1936, followed by a post-exhibition in the capital Nanjing, which also contained 1360 photographs of the various overseas Chinese art collections. The purpose of the Nanjing Exhibition was to publicise the status of the returned exhibits for the 1935 Exhibition, and thus raise the awareness of Chinese cultural relics protection.[180] After that, the artworks were put back into the storage of the NMP collections in Shanghai. With these three connected exhibitions in Shanghai, London, then Nanjing, China's artistic heritage was on public display on both a domestic and international scale never seen.[181] Between 1937 and 1949, in order to avoid the scourge of wars – firstly the Sino-Japan War and then the Chinese Civil War, the Forbidden City collections were forced to move several times, from Shanghai to Chongqing and Southwest China, and back to Nanjing.[182] (Image 6) In 1949, as one consequence of the defeat of the Kuomintang and their retreat to Taiwan after the Civil War, 3,824 crates of Chinese national treasures, including those that participated in the 1935 Exhibition, left mainland China with the KMT.[183] Even though the decade was tumultuous in China, none of the treasures were lost or damaged, despite the incredible quantity. Over the years, the collection of NPM has remained divided. Nowadays, each of these two palace museums showcases the highest achie-

180 Xu, 2019.

181 Guo Hui, "New Categories, New History: 'The Preliminary Exhibition of Chinese Art' in Shanghai, 1935", in Jaynie Anderson, ed., *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence: The Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art*, (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press: 2009), 859-60.

182 For the aftermath of the Chinese government loan after the 1935 Exhibition, see Du, 1995, 39-40; Shambaugh and Shambaugh, 2005, 85-97; The Beigou Legacy, *The National Palace Museum's Early Years in Taiwan*, (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2020), 9-14.

183 Shambaugh and Shambaugh, 2005, 98.

vements of Chinese art to the world, while every time each joint exhibition of the two generated enormous interest among Chinese audiences.[184] In China, many people still hope for the eventual reunification of the collection and the restoration of its comprehensive representation of Chinese traditional culture.[185] Hence, the artworks from the NPM have become a highly politicalised symbol underlining the mainland-Taiwan relationship. Through these works of art, the history and culture of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait are connected, also raising potential problems regarding the definition of Chinese art and repatriation and restitution.

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184 In 2009, led by Director Zhou Gongxin (aka Chou Kung-shin, 周功鑫), of National Palace Museum Taipei visited the National Palace Museum. It was the first reunion of the two museums since the division. Since then, there have been several collaborations between the two museums, including exhibitions, research, and restoration.

185 "About the Palace Museum", *National Palace Museum*, https://en.dpm.org.cn/about/about-museum/, consulted on 25 June 2022.

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What's the Use of the Archive? Questions of Locality, Accessibility, and Digitalisation

Larissa Schulte Nordholt & Marleen Reichgelt

Introduction

What role do archives play in decolonising historical research, especially provenance research? Elaborate literature has been written on archives and the way that they are used, both by historians and philosophers. The importance of reading 'along and against the grain' has long since been embraced by most historians of colonial histories.[186] Yet, as a result perhaps of the importance long attributed to archives within historiography, institutional archives and textual documents remain the central authority in many historical narratives. Historical research tends to remain a highly individualistic and possessive field of knowledge, with singly-authored work as the rigorous standard and with professional practices requiring us to attribute ideas to individual persons and sources. Serious investigation into how the archives underlying one's research have come into being, both in physical terms and regarding their organisation, is far from standard practice.[187] The question of who holds or has held positions of power authorising them to preserve, label, or expose historical data is seldom explicitly under discussion. As a result, we historians rarely turn our attention to archival use and practices.[188] We thereby allow these practices to remain shrouded in romantic narratives of 'discovery', often attributed to the perseverance and/or mental flexibility of the individual historian. Moreover, although the principles of open access are increasingly adhered to within historical research, it is hard to find studies that are *open source* in terms of free (online) access to the data and encoding behind them.[189] What is it that historians and scholars more broadly actually do in the archive? How do they find their truths and how are truths themselves influenced by historical contexts? What authority is required to access the archive and what authority can be gained from it? And finally, how do our uses of and interactions with the archive impact the preservation, categorisation, and exposure of historical data?

These questions are extra pertinent when archives contain data collected in times of and/or relating to empire and colonialism.[190] Researchers have repeatedly pointed out the fragmented and unreliable state of colonial archives, some going as far as stating that these collections have been 'designed to conceal as much as they reveal'.[191] The logic of these archives, moreover, excludes histories of decolonisation from being recognised as archives in their own right.[192] To 'do' decolonial history – or provenance research – therefore must mean interrogating the historical contexts and the

186 See for instance: Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)

187 See: Markus Friedrich, Philipp Müller and Michael Riordan, "Practices of Historical Research in Archives and Libraries from the Eighteenth to the Nineteenth Century", *History of Humanities* 2:1 (2017), 3-13

188 Richard Dunley and Jo Pugh, "Do Archive Catalogues Make History?: Exploring Interactions between Historians and Archives", *Twentieth Century British History* 32:4 (2021), 581-607.

189 Roy Rosenzweig, "Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past", *The Journal of American History* 93:1 (2006), 117-146.

190 Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner (eds.) *Engaging Colonial Knowledge: Reading European Archives in World History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

191 Caroline Elkins, "Looking beyond Mau Mau: Archiving Violence in the Era of Decolonization", *American Historical Review Roundtable: The Archives of Decolonization* 20:3 (2015), 852; reference found in Kirsty Reid and Fiona Paisley, *Sources and Methods in Histories of Colonialism: Approaching the Imperial Archive* (London: Routledge, 2017), 1.

192 Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

unequal power structures that are connected to them, both in terms of physicality and location as well as regarding the content and uses of the archive.

In this paper we want to investigate two interrelated problems. Firstly, we are interested in further problematising the use and accessibility of archives in the Global South. What does it mean for researchers in the Global North to make use of archives in the Global South and what are the caveats connected to creating greater access to archives in the Global South? Secondly, we want to ask how historians can reflect on provenance research and its recent 'archival turn'. We think it is imperative to complicate using the archive as a site of truth finding. It is important, we argue, to not only engage in provenance research trough the archive, but to question the provenance of the archive itself.[193] Archives are not neutral spaces, but organised around a single (institutional or individual) 'creator' and arranged so as to follow the original organisational structure and logic of that 'creator'.[194] It is important to realise that it may not always be possible to use archives that were created with a colonial logic for anti-colonial or decolonial purposes, namely the return of objects to their places of origin. The return of archives and archival collections, or at the very least providing free, equal, and open access to archives and the data they contain, might be the only way to develop new understandings and uses.

Our paper consists of two case studies connected to the questions posed above. We investigate both case studies making use of Sara Ahmed's phenomenological approach in *On the Uses of Use* (2019).[195] We asked ourselves what the consequences are of our uses of certain archives as researcher positioned in the Global North researching people and histories located in the Global South. Following Ahmed, we wanted to know how our use of the archive contributes to shaping its meaning and influenced how the contents of the archive travelled. How, in other words, do our experiences shape the archives and, consequently, the histories we produce when using these archives?

Case Study 1

My (Larissa) first confrontation with issues surrounding the decolonisation and locality of archives between the Global North and South took place in 2018, through my visits to a private Nigerian archive.[196] When I boarded the airplane, I did not know of the existence of this archive yet. Once I had arrived at my destination, I was pointed towards the archive by a historian I had met at the university that was hosting me. He told me about the private and well-preserved archive of one of Nigeria's most important historians of the twentieth century. The archive was more than one person's collection, however, as it also served as a local centre of historical research and education. Nevertheless, it was not very well known internationally.

193 It is useful here to distinguish between the archival principle of provenance, which entails that records originating from the same source should be kept together and not interfiled with records from other sources. Museum curators, art historians, and librarians, on the other hand, use provenance to refer to the history of *ownership* – rather than creator – of an item. See Laura Millar, "The Death of the Fonds and the Resurrection of Provenance: Archival Context in Space and Time", *Archivaria* 53 (2002).

194 For the consequences of these archival principles for Nunavut communities in Canada, whose historical records were largely created by sojourners (missionaries, government officials, whalers etc.) and thus deposited in distant and inaccessible archives, see: Terry Reilly, "From Provenance to Practice: Archival Theory and 'Return to Community'". Presented at the International Canadian Studies Conference (Edinburgh Scotland) and Special Interest Section of the Association of Canadian Archivist, 2005. http://hdl.handle.net/1880/47398.

195 Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

196 We have chosen not to name the archive for now to protect the privacy of all parties involved and to guard against intrusions upon its digitalisation process as the archive has now entered into a partnership with an institution in the Global North.

The heirs and relatives of the late historian wished for the collection to be more widely known and used, especially in a global context, but they wanted to remain in charge of the material as well. In order to secure the funding required to preserve the archive and its content for future generations, the owners needed to generate interest from the Global North. This was in line with the legacy they were trying to protect: in the twentieth century, the home where the archive is now located functioned as an important meeting place for historians from all over the world.

By virtue of its location and past, the archive tells an important story of twentieth century African postcolonial history and historiography. To follow Luise White in her article on 'hodgepodge historiography', the location of archival materials in different places and often outside of institutions reflects the chaotic nature of postcolonial state formation in Africa and is therefore a complement to its history rather than something that detracts from it .[197] As a researcher, the archive itself, its location and its organisation, were of interest to me. My research focuses on the practices of decolonisation as much as it does on the intellectual labour connected to decolonisation. Therefore, this archive represented much more than its combinations of archival documents. To achieve greater recognition for this story, it was looking at funding opportunities from across the world. The archive needed to be reinvigorated as a global centre of knowledge production. Access matters to archives because access might help preserve them for future generations. However, creating greater access might decrease one's hold over the archive's holdings. This is also connected to the question of worth; who determines what we deem worthy enough to put in the archive or to preserve? Where do we think the archive should be located to be 'worthy'? What does an archive need to look and feel like to be recognised as one?

By using the archive, I, a white European researcher, became a part of its history of being visited by scholars from across the globe and perhaps I represented the hope that the archive could once again become a global centre. As I came unannounced, I was a somewhat unexpected but welcome user. The other way around, the archive presented to me a great wealth of knowledge that I could use to write my doctoral thesis. In a way, I represented one of many threads that connected the archive to a potential greater use. This became obvious through the documents that were to be found in the archive as well. By making use of the archival index, a much-loved book where the archivist had written down what boxes contained which materials, I soon realised that the archive was connected to many other archives around the globe by virtue of correspondence and copied reports that I knew were also to be found elsewhere. When I eventually sat down in the archive and worked my way through its entrails, I could confirm that I had already held the cousins of these archival documents, and sometimes even their identical twins, in other archives located in Europe. I knew where some of the documents had originated. My use of the archive partly 'confirmed' that it was useful to researchers from the Global North by connecting it to other histories and by pinpointing the provenance of some of its documents.

Using an archive, then, is not an apolitical activity. It may reinscribe certain power structures, wherein a researcher from Europe travels to an African archive and returns with usable knowledge. Yet, at the same time, we should be careful, as researchers from the Global North, to draw conclusions too rashly. It may very well be that, as a result of enduring neocolonial power structures, such an outcome may be helpful in allowing an archive to survive – even if it is not the ideal decolonial situation. It is, in other words, not necessarily self-evident how an archi ve can or should be used or what the consequences of use may be. Archi-

197 Luise White, "Hodgepodge Historiography: Documents, Itineraries, and the Absence of Archives", *History in Africa* 42 (2015), 309-318.

ves are usually created with particular uses and users in mind. It takes effort to figure out how an archive is supposed to be used, how to make it work for you. As Ahmed writes, 'an archive in use is an archive that could disappear if care is not taken in using the archive'.[198]

Case Study 2

As a researcher working with collections of colonial photography, reflection on the implications and consequences of opening and intensely engaging the colonial photographical archive is an intrinsic part of my (Marleen) research. The PhD project I am currently working on is based on a database containing 1300 photographs taken by the Catholic missionary congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) roughly between 1906 and 1935 on the southwest coast of West Papua. I constructed this database myself, which entailed making high-quality scans of the photographs, piecing together contextual data such as the photographer, place, time etc., and mapping out the social biography of each image (i.e. an overview of the publications in which the picture was featured and/or to whom it was sent).[199] Contextualising the photographs took a lot of time and effort. Since the logic of the archive dictates that photographs are stored and kept separately from other documents, the provenance of photographical collections is often hard to determine. In case of the MSC collection, it seemed as if the majority of the containers had been put together years after the photographs had been taken – a typical retirement project for the elderly missionary – which meant that photographs from different periods and places had been put together haphazardly, that the quality of the prints differed significantly, and that the collection was seemingly far from complete. It also meant that descriptions were often either inadequate (lacking factual information such as a location or data, and often featuring racist or otherwise reductive colonial tropes) or non-existent.

In order to determine where, when, and by whom the photographs had been taken, and what was depicted in them, I repeatedly compared and contrasted them with other documents – books, articles, letters, reports – concerning the mission and with each other. I must have seen each of the pictures hundreds of times. I have seen and held them as loose prints, contained in albums, printed in publications, sometimes circulating on the internet. But mostly, I have watched – scrutinised – scans. The 600dpi high-quality scans of each photograph opened up an entirely different way of watching these images. It enabled me to zoom in on every detail, to put different pictures (different people) next to each other, to compare different versions of the same photograph – all within a matter of seconds. I have literally studied every square inch, over and over again. The different photographic styles, the scenes and the people depicted in the photographs have become familiar to me. The hundreds, perhaps thousands of unknown faces have turned into recognisable individuals.

For my intents and purposes, this resulted in a wealth of material. As I am interested in both practices on the ground such as the dissemination of western clothing as well as interactions between the missionaries and West Papuan children, whose presence in textual sources in the colonial archive is often fleeting and indirect, the photographs formed an invaluable source. As a record which has preserved the body, dress, face, gaze, expression, action, and movements of the people depicted, photography can help us see eye-to-eye with a historical individual. Moreover, contextualised photographs always show people, their movements, and encounters in time and space, making it a dense source depicting small, stilled

198 Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, 15.

199 Marleen Reichgelt, 'Marind children through the lens of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Missionary: photography on Netherlands New Guinea, 1906-1935' (Master's thesis in history; Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen 2016).

lived experiences. In my research, the database helped me to approach people who in most missionary sources had been reduced to anonymous stereotypes as living, individual historical actors. Yet, the method behind it is both intimate and extremely invasive. In order to recognise people, I have compared faces, noses, hair, scarification patterns, hands, feet, knees, shoulders, breasts. At times, it has made me feel like a voyeur of the worst kind. It raises the question who has the right to watch people like this. To whom has my opening and disclosing of this photographical archive been 'useful'? Have I put people on display? Who has the right to look, to determine, to engage?

These questions have been raised before.[200] Mieke Bal has pointed out how the scholar discussing visual sources inevitably becomes an 'expository agent'[201] – especially since colonial representations of people and cultures are not a distant, extinct thing of the past, but still present and influential in today's postcolonial societies.[202] Debates about the ethical responsibilities of the photographic historian in a global image economy are calling attention both to the role of photographic images and to the power relations that sustain and make possible photographic meanings.[203] Anthropological research in Oceania has been leading in terms of considering present meanings of historical photographs, tracing the various uses and connotations of photography through time and space, considering the meaning of colonial photography for the descendants of the communities depicted in the photographs. This research has included and promoted the visual repatriation of colonial photographs, making scattered photographic collections in museums and archives (digitally or physically) available to host communities worldwide.[204] But although large scale digitalisation may improve equal access and allows for different perspectives to emerge, it is not without risks. Loss of context may be one of them. People depicted in colonial imagery are – once again – subjected to the inquiring gaze of strangers halfway across the world. As they cannot be asked for their permission in this matter, it is important to wonder whether our gaze is legitimised. Issues of privacy and ownership remain pertinent. Who owns or controls access to historical images – and, consequently, to some of the chief ingredients of history – has become an urgent, weighty issue, even more so due to the commercialisation and privatisation of digital archives.[205]

I had always imagined my database and the information gathered in there to be made freely available online. But in the course of my research and throughout the process of working with the database, I have become very much aware of my own limited interpretations.

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200 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008); Jane Lydon, "'Behold the Tears': Photography as Colonial Witness", *History of Photography*, 34.3 (2010), 234-250; Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis.* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Jane Lydon, The Flash of Recognition: Photography and the Emergence *of Indigenous Rights.* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2012); Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso, 2012); Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

201 Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Practice of Cultural Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 197.

202 Mieke Bal, "The Politics of Citation", *Diacritics*, 21:1 (1991), 34.

203 Jennifer Tucker and Tina Campt, "Entwined Practices: Engagements with Photography in Historical Inquiry", *History and Theory*, 48:4 (2009), 2.

204 See Gaynor Macdonald, "Photos in Wiradjuri Biscuit Tins: Negotiating Relatedness and Validating Colonial Histories", Oceania, 73:4 (2003), 225-242; Tommaso Sbriccoli, "Between the Archive and the Village: the Lives of Photographs in Time and Space", *Visual Studies* 31:4 (2016), 295-309; Jane Lydon, "Democratising the Photographic Archive", in: Reid and Paisley, Sources and Methods, 13-31.

205 See Kimberly Christen, "Relationships, Not Records: Digital Heritage and the Ethics of Sharing Indigenous Knowledge Online", in: *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities*, edited by J. Sayers (Routledge, 2018); Temi Odumosu, "The Crying Child: On Colonial Archives, Digitization, and Ethics of Care in the Cultural Commons", *Current Anthropology* 61 (2020), 289-302.

I lack the cultural knowledge as well as the appropriate language to describe these historical records pertaining to various communities in West Papua. I have used key words to link and organise subcollections, but I feel increasingly uncomfortable with 'labelling' the photographs and those depicted in them. The geographical and temporal visualisation options of the database make it possible to 'follow' people's trajectories through space and time – is that not too much of an infringement of their privacy? In other words, the database as I have constructed it primarily revolves around my *use* of and for it. To make it useful for others, it has to be opened up, shared, and constructed in collaboration with others. It has to be not just 'open access', but *open source*. My plans to travel to West Papua and discuss the possibilities of the (visual) reparations of the collection have so far been thwarted by the COVID-19 pandemic.[206] I hope to be able pick these questions and issues up again in a postdoc project.

To conclude: From my research and engagement with the archive I have learned that photographic collections form an excellent type of colonial heritage to be 'decolonised' i.e. reappropriated and re-understood within different contexts and outside of colonial frameworks. Multiperspectivity is intrinsically inscribed into photographs. Yet to realize this potential, collections need to be made widely available and accessible to diverse audiences. Presently, relevant Dutch collections are tucked away in relatively unknown archives in relatively inaccessible institutions with regards to location, opening hours, and language. The Heritage Centre for Dutch Monastic Life preserves numerous significant photographic collections concerning peoples and histories from all over the world. These are especially relevant since missionary institutions mostly worked in fixed areas for extended periods of time, documented the cultures and intimate lives of communities and families, and also amassed large textual archives which make it possible to contextualise the photographs (determine their provenance). These are sources with great potential and potentially great emotional value, especially for communities with 'blank pages in their family albums'.[207] For now the question remains open: how can colonial photographic archives located in the Netherlands be shared in such a way that depicted communities not only have access to them, but can also contribute to their (r--e)understandings and (re)framings?

Concluding Thoughts

The classical concept of the archive is to deposit, to label, to tuck away 'safely' with the archivist as gatekeeper, to be taken out only for approved uses: exhibition in the museum, examination by researchers, restoration by the curator. This classical idea of the archive may not take into consideration the myriad of ways in which archives are living things, intimately connected to their communities. By using the archive in the 'classical' way we might reinforce pre-existing power structures that primarily benefit the Global North, or repeat imperial narratives and ideas. In her recent work *Potential History*, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay discusses the "violence involved in the implementation of practices and procedures such as collecting, classifying, studying, cataloguing, and indexing and on the institutionalisation of these practices as neutral with respect to their objects".[208]

If we take the two collections described above as a starting point, we might wonder what it means to 'share' the archive, to create greater, global access. Greater access in the first case is connected to greater worth which is in itself connected to the location of the archive. Its location in the Global South makes it less accessible to researchers in the Global North.

206 I had obtained funding for a visit in early 2021.

207 Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, "When is a Photograph Worth a Thousand Words?", in: *Photography's Other Histories, eds.* C. Pinney and N. Peterson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

208 Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), 42.

Where worth is located, to again follow Ahmed, is important in this story.[209] Location, moreover, is intimately connected to the histories of the postcolonial, as White has noted in her article.[210] For postcolonial histories of the Global South her 'hodgepodge historiography' means working with the bricolage of history as it has become literally deposited in various corners of the world.[211]

Yet, as the second case shows, concerning the visual archive, digitalisation or repatriation of colonial archives can only be an answer to this dilemma if it is undertaken in collaboration with others and fully takes into account issues of ownership, exposure, contextualisation. Exploring the possibility of making archival collections 'open source' might be an answer here. To conclude, we want to ask how we can complicate our understanding of how we, as researchers from the Global North, make use of the archive. Is it possible to use the archive in such a way that it becomes a truly shared, democratised space?

209 Ahmed, *On the Uses of Use*, 12.
210 White, "Hodgepodge Historiography".
211 It is important to add here that former colonial metropoles, such as London and Paris, tend to hold bigger parts of that detritus than the formally colonised places. This does not make it easier for those with less access to time and money to conduct research, often on the part of their own societies.

Contributors

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Marie Hoffmann holds a Ph.D. in Museum Studies and is an Associate Researcher at University of Lille, CNRS, UMR 8529 - IRHiS - Institut de Recherches Historiques du Septentrion. Her research areas include the history of collections and collectors, the history of anthropology and ethnography and artifacts provenance research. Since 2018, Marie has been working in different Canadian Museums and Archives as an exhibition manager and archivist.

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Samuel Bachmann is curator of the ethnographic collections from Africa at Bernisches Historisches Museum since 2017. He graduated with a Master of Arts in history and political science at the Institute for European Global Studies at the University of Basel. During his studies as well as thereafter, he held various positions in different ethnographic and historical museums in Switzerland: e.g., at the Historical Museum and at the Museum der Kulturen Basel. Since 2019, he is a Ph.D. student at the Center for African Studies in Basel, working on his dissertation project "German Colonial Heritage in Swiss Ethnographic Museums: Traces, Trajectories, Transformation".

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In the debate about the colonial past of ethnographic museums in Western Europe, provenance research has emerged as a central method for researching colonial legacies and addressing museums' need for decolonisation. Researchers have started to investigate colonial era collections systematically to create a sound basis for dealing with these collections in the future. As a consequence, they are increasingly seen as archives in themselves. What has been lacking, however, is a debate about the theoretical implications of this approach – what are the implications of such an archival perspective and what kinds of knowledge can provenance research create? To find answers to this question, the authors of this volume engage with a range of materials – from the famous Benin Royal Collections to a seemingly insignificant Egyptian doll. They approach these materials sometimes on a theoretical, sometimes on a very practical level to offer their different visions of what a theoretically grounded provenance research may look like.

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