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A Colonial Thing Booklet

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Preface

On 28 November 2017, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, gave a speech at the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, announcing his intentions of developing a programme for the temporary or definitive restitution of African cultural heritage from French museums within five years. Even before this speech, numerous institutions had already been addressing and dealing with questions of returning cultural property from colonial contexts. In place of such institutions, we would like to quote from the ICOM (International Council of Museums) Code of Ethics for Museums as well as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

The International Council of Museums defined the following guidelines on the return and restitution of cultural property in 1986:

“Museums should be prepared to initiate dialogue for the return of cultural property to a country or people of origin. This should be undertaken in an impartial manner, based on scientific, professional and humanitarian principles as well as applicable local, national and international legislation, in preference to action at a governmental or political level.

When a country or people of origin seeks the restitution of an object or specimen that can be demonstrated to have been exported or otherwise transferred in violation of the principles of international and national conventions, and shown to be part of that country’s or people’s cultural or natural heritage, the museum concerned should, if legally free to do so, take prompt and responsible steps to cooperate in its return.”

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007 includes the following relevant articles:

Article 11

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.

2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.

Article 12

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.

2. States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.

We would like to present four different guidelines on the restitution of cultural property from colonial contexts developed within the last two years. Against this backdrop, we attribute special importance to the answers these guidelines provide to the following five questions:

1. What do they understand as the colonial period?
2. What can or should be returned?
3. How should it be returned?
4. Where should it go?
5. How can we shape the future of ethnographic museums?

As we summarised the answers to these questions, they are necessarily our interpretations of the texts. If you would like to find out more for yourself and draw your own conclusions, we recommend using the original texts.

Treasures in Trusted Hands: Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects. Jos van Beurden (Netherlands, 2017)

In his book published in 2017, Jos van Beurden gives an overview of past restitutions by European museums and their associated problems. Based on lessons learned, he develops nine principles for dealing with colonial and cultural objects as well as a model for dealing with disputes about colonial cultural objects.

1 What is the colonial period?

The colonial period is split into three phases: Phase 1 is characterised by the initiation of trade relations and the subsequent appropriation of land; Phase 2 comprises settler colonialism and the economic exploitation of the colonies; Phase 3 covers the period of decolonisation (roughly since 1945). Each of these phases went hand in hand with particular collection practices. While the Europeans collected objects as personal souvenirs, trophies or gifts in Phase 1, European collection activities peaked in Phase 2 of the colonial period in line with the establishment of numerous European museums, official collection strategies and financial support from European governments. The majority of objects were acquired without the consent of their indigenous owners. Europeans kept actively collecting objects in their former colonies also in the period of decolonisation, even though more and more countries adopted laws to prohibit the trade and export of cultural heritage objects.

2 What can or should be returned?

Objects of cultural or historical importance taken in the European colonial period (which also includes the period of decolonization) with or without adequate payment or compensation should be returned, if the community of origin requests their restitution.

3 How should it be returned?

Museums should conduct provenance research, publish their results and actively establish contact with the respective communities of origin. If these communities are interested in restitution, the museum encourages representatives of these communities of origin to issue an official claim for return. It is essential for the mutual understanding of both sides that such a claim for restitution clearly defines which objects should be returned.

4 Where should it go?

Objects are often returned to state governments because it presents the easiest logistical solution. Sometimes this approach is not ideal, however, as objects are often closely connected to other institutions or individuals, such as their manufacturers, first and subsequent owners etc.

5 How to shape the future?

In the near future, museums will increasingly become "round tables", places where all stakeholders come together to talk, negotiate, fight and work together to determine the best future for an object.

"The exchange can be tough, but in the end they jointly decide about the object's future and choose where the object will be in trusted hands."

Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts (German Museums Association, May 2018)

Published in May 2018, these Guidelines were developed by a group of scientists and museum experts to address all German museums with collection items from the colonial period. In July 2019 the German Museums Association released an updated version of the Guidelines.

1 What is the colonial period?

The Guidelines do not use the term “colonial period” but instead “colonial contexts”, which corresponds to an extension of the usual definition. This also means that colonial developments began before 1884, when the German Empire officially became a colonial power, and did not abruptly end after 1918/19, when the German Empire was stripped of its colonies. Colonial contexts go hand in hand with extreme political power imbalances, which result in the discrimination and exploitation of the local population. Among the various elements of exploitation was the collection of cultural goods. Colonial contexts share the same ideology that non-European cultures are seen as inferior. Colonial structures and ways of thinking still exist today.

2 What can or should be returned?

Cultural goods eligible for repatriation are often classified as “historically and culturally sensitive objects”. Their acquisition often involved the use of force and/or highly dependent relationships. In addition, these objects may reflect discrimination and colonial or racist ideologies.

The Guidelines use the term culturally sensitive objects for human remains as well as religious and ceremonial objects of special significance in the community of origin. Historically sensitive objects can be deemed to be items from collections of all types of objects which have been collected, acquired or created under formal colonial rule. Such historically and culturally sensitive objects from colonial contexts intersect and overlap in most European museums.

3 How should it be returned?

Museums should initiate a critical examination of their colonial collections and conduct research on the contexts in which acquisitions were made in order to determine whether or not items are historically or culturally sensitive objects. Only in a next step may museums call into question whether or not such objects should remain in their collections or be returned. If communities of origin request the restitution of objects, they should be processed in due time. Case-by-case assessment may also entail the consultation of experts (anthropologists, lawyers, ethicists, etc.). The decision on returning any object is the exclusive responsibility of the museum. When a museum has decided on the return of a museum object, this should be agreed in writing with the negotiating partner. The question of repatriation costs also needs to be clarified. The return of museum objects may be accompanied by a handover ceremony, which may also involve museum staff.

4 Where should it go?

The objects may be returned either to various groups (countries or communities or origin) or individuals. Each potential repatriation should be assessed as an individual case.

5 How to shape the future?

Museums should deal with their colonial past on a long-term basis. Provenance research will become one of the most important curatorial tasks of any museum. Moreover, museums will increasingly work together with representatives of communities of origin, such as in the development of new exhibitions and the definition of guidelines on how to treat their objects in museum collections.

“The German Museums Association considers it essential that the colonial past of museums and their collections be reappraised.”

The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics. Felwine Sarr und Benedicte Savoy (November 2018).

In 2017 the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, commissioned the Senegalese author, musician and economist, Felwine Sarr, as well as the French art historian, Benedicte Savoy, to write a report on the restitution of cultural property from sub-Saharan Africa in French museums.

1 What is the colonial period?

The colonial period was characterised by extreme injustice and imbalance between European countries and their colonies. The formal colonial period in Africa began with the Berlin Conference (1884/1885) and ended with the independence of numerous African nations in 1960, although colonial structures also existed prior to the colonial period and continued well after the independence of nations. The injustice and imbalance of the formal colonial period still exists today. In the nineteenth century, the colonial powers England, Belgium, Germany, Holland and France conducted numerous military raids and so-called punitive expeditions to expand their territory. The European strategy of war included the acquisition of objects of African cultural heritage; millions of African objects were transported to Europe in that period. According to the authors, over 90% of the material cultural legacy of sub-Saharan Africa remains preserved and housed in European museums: this extremely high ratio also represents the key difference between this area and other former European colonies.

2 What can or should be returned?

All African objects in European collections ended up there as the result of colonial appropriation. This means that the acquisition of cultural goods and their relocation to museums in the capitals of Europe was generally based on an imbalance of power, irrespective of whether or not these objects were collected under threat of military force. This imbalance was reinforced by the subsequent concentration of expert knowledge on African culture in European museums. For this reason, all objects from sub-Saharan Africa should be returned. Priority is attributed to the restitution of objects as already requested by their communities of origin, such as the restitution request of Nigeria for objects from the Kingdom of Benin.

3 How should it be returned?

The processing of requests for restitution requires radical changes. In the future, such requests should not be made by the communities of origin. In contrast, museums should prove that they are entitled to have certain objects in their collections. In other words, as long as a museum cannot provide explicit evidence or information witnessing to the full consent on the part of the objects' community of origin at the moment when the objects were separated from them, the object in question should be returned.

4 Where should it go?

Restitutions are based on a bilateral agreement. The objects are returned to today's African states, which may then decide on how to proceed and pass on the objects.

5 How to shape the future?

The restitution of all objects from French museums to African states may be regarded as reparation for the colonial period and represents a fundamental step towards accounting for colonialism. The importance of this restitution process goes far beyond the sphere of museums and will have positive consequences for all African nations. In the future, world culture museums in Europe will exhibit either newly acquired objects or duplicates of older yet returned cultural property.

"The extraction and deprivation of culture heritage and cultural property not only concerns the generation who participates in the plundering as well as those who must suffer through this extraction. It becomes inscribed throughout the long duration of societies, conditioning the flourishing of certain societies while simultaneously continuing to weaken others."

Indigenous Repatriation Handbook (Canada, 2019)

The Handbook was published in British Columbia in 2019 and exclusively addresses the Canadian situation. It was developed by representatives of the First Nations in Canada to support indigenous communities of the First Nations in questions of restitution.

1 What is the colonial period?

The interactions between the indigenous population and Europeans were mainly based on equitable trade relations until the mid-nineteenth century. The first permanent settlements of British colonisers on indigenous territory are seen as the beginning of the colonial period. Various foreign epidemics decimated the indigenous population, which encouraged European settlement endeavours even more. In 1876 the colonial government passed the Indian Act, which forced the First Nations to choose between either total assimilation and abandonment of their language and culture or accepting to live in reserves. In 1884 the Indian Act was amended to include the Potlatch Ban, rendering traditional cultural ceremonies illegal and threatening offenders with confiscation of their treasures as well as imprisonment. In 1892 Canada's residential school system was formalised, removing indigenous children from their homes to alienate them from their traditional way of living. The Potlatch Ban was dropped as late as 1951, while the last residential school only closed in 1996. Such colonial structures are still affecting Canada and contribute to the ever-present inequality between the indigenous population and those of European origin.

2 What can or should be returned?

Human remains and objects of great cultural significance, such as religious objects, should be returned irrespective of their date of acquisition. Also objects acquired during as well as directly before or after the Potlatch Ban era (1884–1951) should be restituted, as the loss of culture in that period is considered as particularly traumatic. The indigenous population sold certain cultural and ceremonial objects because they had been stripped of their meaning. Repatriation is a vital element of cultural revitalisation and supports trauma healing.

3 How should it be returned?

In Canada it is legally possible to return objects to the First Nations; such restitutions have increasingly taken place in the last few decades. For this reason, the Handbook does not address museums but instead supports indigenous communities with practical advice on how to convey requests for restitution. The Handbook explains, for example, how to best locate and identify the ancestral remains and cultural belongings of one's own indigenous community in museum collections, how to best communicate with museums, and how to apply for funding as needed to cover the costs associated with the repatriation of remains and cultural belongings.

4 Where should it go?

All repatriation efforts take place in cooperation with communities instead of individuals because it is often impossible to attribute objects to individuals. Furthermore, it is vital for the entire First

Nations community to support such repatriation efforts. What happens to these objects after repatriation is left to the discretion of the members of the community. They may either be used in their ceremonies or exhibited in their own museum.

5 How to shape the future?

Museums carry the responsibility to affect societal change by mainstreaming Canada's colonial history with indigenous people while actively working to set things right for the indigenous population. The First Nations understand the repatriation of their belongings as reparation. Repatriation to First Nations ideally paves the way for museums to become places where both sides work together on coming to terms with the colonial past.

"...the people working in museums today are not the ones who put Indigenous Ancestral remains and cultural heritage into their institutions. The real shame would be if they refused to work with Indigenous Peoples."

Pohl Collection 1817 to 1822, East Brazil

Johann Emanuel Pohl reported the following on the acquisition of several objects in 1832:

"I was also able to get possession of one of the aforementioned infant carrier straps; the owner did not want to part with it, until Alferes Morreira [the Portuguese village administrator] offered her some tobacco as a gift."

"One of these Botocudo women was characterised by particularly large wooden plugs. As I wished to have these plugs, I offered her gifts in return, and she did not hesitate to trade her Botocudo ornaments for a rosary, a knife, and a small mirror."

"They use several roots and herbs to treat their illnesses; sometimes they also resort to superstitious means and firmly believe in amulets made of tree roots and animal bones. I was not able to acquire such an object, even though I had seen almost all children wearing them."

Claudia Augustat, curator at Weltmuseum Wien, on indigenous groups and the collector:

"The objects are attributed to a specific group and region according to the inventory list: infant carrier strap, Porekamekran, State of Goyaz; lip plugs, Botocudo, Minas Gerais. How the objects were actually acquired is only described in Johann Emanuel Pohl's travel accounts.

Pohl (1782–1834) was in charge of botany on the Austrian expedition to Brazil. He travelled through eastern Brazil, which at the time was not a Portuguese colony anymore but had instead been elevated to the same rank as the motherland. Pohl regarded the violent behaviour of the indigenous population as justified. He argued that violence was the only way for them to oppose the consequences

of colonialism: displacement, slavery, extinction. The Porekamekran do not exist anymore. A related group are the Krahô. Of the Botocudo people, only one subgroup, the Krenak, are still alive. They see themselves as the descendants of the Botocudo." Richard Schomburgk, Director of the Adelaide Botanic Garden, reported in 1879:

Schomburgk Collection 1879, Australia

Richard Schomburgk, director of the Botanical Garden in Adelaide, reports in 1879 about the origin of the object as follows:

"No one may witness the magical ceremony, or even behold the magical instruments, which would otherwise lose their power. Women would be guilty of a capital crime upon seeing them. [...] The instruments are hidden in secret places after the ceremony. [...] My friend found these instruments, 30 in number, hidden in a cave and covered by dry grass. He took them with him and showed them to a neighbouring tribe. The men were in a frenzy as soon as they caught sight of them. When a few women approached them, they quickly covered the instruments and ordered the women to be off."

In 2011 Stephen Ryan, chairman of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council commented about returns:

"In the case of artefacts held in Australia, the law states that if they were stolen – or given – before 1969, they do not have to be handed back. From our perspective, the passage of time is irrelevant – stolen artefacts should be returned. But that is not to say all were taken illegally. Some were traded fair and square and, in many cases, people were given artefacts that they themselves did not steal. To those people, all we can really hope for is that one day they hand them back out of the goodness of their heart. [...] In the case of artefacts held overseas, we should appeal through the United Nations, or through foreign governments, to have them returned. Unfortunately, somebody has to pay for that process and my view is it should be the Commonwealth or state government. It certainly should not be Aboriginal people, who were the victims of the removal in the first place."

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Westenholz Collection 1886, Easter Island

The lieutenant captain of the SMS Hyena Wilhelm Geiseler reports 1883 about the collection acquisition:

"As far as the acquisition of ethnographic objects is concerned, the following shall be noted: Before we made for the island, we had prepared a few old pieces of clothing as well as mirrors, knives, pipes, tobacco etc. from the crew's personal belongings in order to trade for whatever we needed. Right from the beginning, however, we noticed that only the clothes were of interest to them. The natives of the two villages were thus led to Mr. Salom's cabin, where the trading was to take place. The prices were negotiated by Mr. Salom, who was familiar with the value of the traded objects, and according to the relevant principles of acquiring ethnographic objects. Many of these ethnographic objects are today not made any more and were the last to be found on the island."

The Rapanui sculptor Benedikto Tuki says the following in 2018 about the importance of the cultural heritage of Easter Island:

"Perhaps in the past we did not attach so much importance to Hoa Hakananai'a and his brothers, but nowadays people on the island are starting to realise just how much of our heritage there is around the world and starting to ask why our ancestors are in foreign museums."

Claudia Augustat, curator at Weltmuseum Wien, outlines her research on the history of the object:

"According to the inventory entry, this breast plate is part of a collection that Heinrich Freiherr von Westenholz presented to Weltmuseum Wien as a gift in 1886.

Research documents how the collection passed from hand to hand and indicates the parties involved: the Austrian Honorary Consul Westenholz used to shop at Klée & Koecher in Hamburg. The department store, on the other hand, was a customer of Consul Schlubach in Valparaíso, who established contact between the German gunboat SMS Hyäne (His Majesty's Ship 'Hyena') and Alexander Salmon, a relative of Schlubach's Tahitian wife. Salmon governed Easter Island on behalf of a British company. In 1882, he supported the SMS Hyäne's crew on a scientific expedition and managed the acquisition of ethnographic objects.

The Rapanui had been forced to resettle in the western part of the island in the 1860s. In 1888, Easter Island was annexed by Chile and leased to another company. The local population remained interned. In 1966, the island became an integral part of Chile with the same rights and privileges for its inhabitants. Today the pectoral ornament is depicted on the flag of Rapa Nui."

Field Columbian Museum Chicago Collection 1894, Canada

James Deans, the collector of the mask, says in 1882 about the upcoming exhibition in Chicago:

"The wide world will stand in amazement."

Ruth Gladstone-Davies summarises her impressions of her visit to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford and the British Museum in London in 2013 as follows:

"I came back to Haida Gwaii with hope and far more humble than I left. I realized that I may liked, loved, or even hated some parts of the journey. I may weep for some of the pieces hidden in dark drawers or boxes far away on another continent, but I know in my heart that they are safe, there for yet another time, and because of our journey, the people who care for them do so with an open heart and a softer touch."

Claudia Augustat, curator at Weltmuseum Wien, outlines her research on the mask:

"The inventory lists this object as a mask from the Haida at the Pacific Northwest Coast of America. The Field Columbian Museum in Chicago exchanged it for another object with the Weltmuseum Wien in 1894.

My research shows that the mask was part of a collection that had been commissioned for the Chicago World's Fair in 1892. The World's Fair was held to commemorate Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of America four centuries earlier. The ethnographic pavilion was coordinated by Franz Boas who is considered the father of American anthropology. On his behalf, the Scotsman James Deans assembled a collection of Haida objects.

Later on, Deans accompanied several research expeditions that were said to have repeatedly raided tombs. His role in this is still unclear, though.

In the late nineteenth century, Canada was still part of the British Empire and its indigenous population without any rights whatsoever. The Potlatch, their most important religious and socio-economic ceremony, had been prohibited, and sacred artefacts seized in raids."

Leder Collection 1899, Mongolia

Hans Leder reports in 1899 about his conflicts of conscience while collecting:

"At the various public prayer wheels, public altars, stupas and stone hills for rituals, pious pilgrims often lay down all kinds of objects, clay tablets and figures, prayer flags, pictures, prayers as well as all sorts of rags, stones and whatever unbelievable things as offerings. The small objects listed in this collection with the numbers above are from such places. Collecting such objects may only be done to a certain extent and with the utmost caution because doing so is highly dangerous. If I was ever caught in all my enthusiasm for such Buddhist objects, I guess I would fare rather badly. On the other hand, though, there is certainly no other way to get hold of these objects. I will continue collecting them with great care. May the Buddhist gods forgive my sacrilege! After all, I only do it to let their light and glory also shine under a different sky."

Claudia Augustat, curator at Weltmuseum Wien, on the objects and the collector:

"The inventory entry indicates these objects as oracle bones from Mongolia. The shoulder bones of sheep were inscribed with Tibetan writing. It is also noted that they were removed from a public altar. Weltmuseum Wien acquired them from Hans Leder in 1906. Leder (1843–1921) was an entomologist who became increasingly interested in ethnography in the course of his life. He also made a name for himself as a collector of Buddhist ritual items. The mere fact that many of his objects were taken directly from altars or temples awarded them special significance according to Hans Leder.

In Leder's time, Mongolia was part of the Chinese Empire and Tibetan Buddhism the predominant religion. In 1911, Outer Mongolia became independent with the help of Russia. Four years later, however, China downgraded their status to partial autonomy. In 1924, the Soviet Union helped Mongolia to establish the Mongolian People's Republic. Inner Mongolia always remained an autonomous region of China."

Pöch Collection 1907–1908, Botswana

Rudolf Pöch 1916 on the selection of persons for his phonographic recordings:

"The whole success of phonographic recording ultimately depends on choosing the right individual. The same lesson biologists have been learning time and again applies here as well: the findings often depend on choosing the right animal or plant species for your observations or experiments. (...) Aside from intelligence and know-how, certain physical qualities are required as well, such as a voice suitable for recording and clear articulation. All these traits are rarely found in a single man. If such a man can nonetheless be found and informed about the purpose of the recording so as to capture his interest, the phonographer is all of a sudden blessed with unexpectedly rich and valuable material!"

Winani Thebele, Chief Curator and HOD Ethnology Division at the Botswana National Museum, comments:

"An analysis of these colonial collections would then look at; the kind of objects migrated, current state of the objects, what the benefit is today to both the current owners and countries of origin. What artefacts were taken away? Where are they now? If on display, what knowledge, information, stereotype, do they convey? Is this knowledge shared and equally? What about those objects still stored in boxes, store-rooms, warehouses as is the case in many European museums today? Hence, the conversations going on today on a shared responsibility and global networks on the same collections, which Lynn Meskell has linked to communities of provenance. This encompasses the call for return of cultural property to source nations and indigenous people, discussions

on historic redress to the legacies of colonialism, race relations and exploitation. The museum has therefore, been very key in addressing all these key issues and offering space for the debates."

Nadja Haumberger, Curator at Weltmuseum Wien, on the object and how it was acquired:

This apron, called *khiba* in Setswana, was collected by Rudolf Pöch (1870 -1921) in today's North West District, Ngamiland in Botswana. At the time, Botswana was under British protectorate, colonial structures Pöch applied to travel through Botswana as well as Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa from November 1907 to December 1909. The Austrian Academy of Sciences commissioned his travels and subsequently donated a total of 1.075 inventory numbers to the museum. Documentation on the ethnographic collections is scarce as the main objective of Pöch's journey was anthropological research. For this, Pöch recorded people's measurements, exhumed craniums and skeletons, produced sound recordings and took photographs, in part of prisoners of war. Thus, ethical missteps by European actors also contributed to the formation of collections. Today, we have other guidelines for collecting and museum practice. Pöch's specifically were met with local resistance even at the time of collection.

Felbermayer Collection 1958, Easter Island

In a letter to Irmgard Moschner, scientific employee of the museum, Fritz Felbermayer writes in 1958:

"Dear esteemed colleague!
Thank you for your letter from 9 December, in which you confirmed to have received my shipment. It goes without saying that I am not about to forget the collection in Vienna. I often just need some time to find a way to get everything out of Chile. Please bear with me and be patient. The fish nets and harpoons from Easter Island should arrive in Valparaiso in February. Then I will see to it that they somehow end up in Vienna. The stone fish hook I will personally transport to Vienna, as it is far too rare and precious to entrust it to postal services."

Te Pou Huke comments on the archaeological practice on Easter Island as follows in 2015:

"The archaeologists come here, enter a tapu land that is the ahu, excavate, do all the research, and loot everything. That is theft. Because we don't go to where these Norwegian, British, Spanish archaeologists live to profane their graves. If I did, they would give me life imprisonment. Why do they have these licenses, then? This term 'archaeology', is as if this was someone else's, as if it didn't belong to us. That label 'archaeology', we must eradicate it completely...Our 'archaeology' is part of our being. We grew up in this landscape and since we were children, they told us the stories, stories that were told to them. That is how our history was transmitted to us. But now they come and put a rock that reads 'National Park' in the place where my grandparents lived. That is theft. This term, 'National Park' is a theft. Just like Archaeology is."

Claudia Augustat, curator at Weltmuseum Wien, on the collector and the situation on Easter Island:

"In the period between 1956 and 1961, Fritz Felbermayer gifted the Weltmuseum Wien 25 objects from Rapa Nui, including this woven bag. According to Felbermayer, the bag originates from the *Ahu Tongariki*, a ceremonial platform. Felbermayer was an agricultural engineer and emigrated to Chile in 1936. As the co-founder of the Society of Friends of Easter Island, he became actively engaged in the situation of the interned Rapanui. His extensive travelling enabled him to supply them with medication and relief aid. He documented their culture, visited their ceremonial sites, and collected numerous ethnographic objects, most of which are today found in a museum in Viña del Mar. Felbermayer was honoured both by Chile and Austria for his services. The *Ahu Tongariki* was located in the easternmost part of the island, far away from the interned Rapanui. *Ahus* are burial sites adorned with the famous *moais*. In 1935, all *ahus* and *moais* were declared national monuments and thus placed under protection."

Sammlung Malkin 1989, Kolumbien

Claudia Augustat, curator at Weltmuseum Wien, summarises the information on the object, the collector and the legal situation:

"This clay vessel from the Quimbaya culture (6th century BCE until 1500 CE) is from Columbia. The inventory entry indicates that it was acquired by Borys Malkin in 1989. Nevertheless, there is no further information, which significantly reduces the scientific value of the object. Borys Malkin (1917–2009) was a Polish traveller and merchant of ethnographic and archaeological objects. His extensive collections are found in museums all around the world. From 1964 to 1995, Weltmuseum Wien acquired a total of 977 objects and 769 photographs from Malkin. In 1970, UNESCO adopted the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. The countries signing this Convention agree to return any illegally imported cultural property to its country of origin. As Columbia joined the Convention in 1986, the export of any archaeological material requires a permit. Also Austria signed the Convention. The provisions of the Convention do not apply retroactively and, therefore, are irrelevant for any objects acquired before 2015."

Replica of the court dwarfs from Benin

Art historian Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie from the University of California on property rights in 2019:

"We need a discourse that recognises African ownership of the intellectual property rights of its cultural patrimony, and devise means for the continent to benefit from the value such cultural patrimony generates."

Claudia Augustat, curator at Weltmuseum Wien, on the court dwarf replica and the reaction of the Nigerian community in Vienna:

"These replica of court dwarfs from the Benin Kingdom are sold at the Weltmuseum Wien Shop. They are smaller than the originals, made of coloured stoneware, and placed on a pedestal. The originals are put on display in the gallery Benin and Ethiopia. They rank among the oldest works of art from Benin and were presumably placed on a royal, ancestral altar. Two years after the royal palace had been looted in 1897, the two figures found their way via British forces and German collections to Vienna.

Offering such replicas for sale caused indignation among members of the Nigerian community in Vienna. In their eyes, these replicas represent the illegal commercialisation of their cultural heritage, especially since the legal status of the originals is still unclear."

Maori Tattoo

Curator Claudia Augustat at Weltmuseum Wien on how the T-shirt was acquired:

"I bought the T-shirt with this exhibition in mind. The whole story about the copyright dispute is extremely fascinating. There are so many questions that are really difficult to answer. What may a copyright actually apply to? Is there a difference between inspiration and cultural appropriation? When can we call something a colonial act? And if we deem it important to protect the immaterial cultural heritage, where do we begin and where to we stop?"

Ngahua Te Awekotuku from the Victoria University of Wellington commented on the copyright dispute as follows in 2011:

"It is astounding that a Pakeha tattooist who inscribes an African American's flesh with what he considers to be a Maori design has the gall to claim ... that design as his intellectual property. The tattooist has never consulted with Maori, has never had experience of Maori and originally and obviously stole the design that he put on Tyson. The tattooist has an incredible arrogance to assume he has the intellectual right to claim the design form of an indigenous culture that is not his."

Claudia Augustat, curator at Weltmuseum Wien, outlines the conflict about the tattoo as seen on this T-shirt:

"The T-shirt depicts a stylised Maori tattoo which tattoo artist Victor Whitmill designed for the boxer Mike Tyson. Tyson wears this tattoo around his left eye.

When one of the actors in the motion picture The Hangover 2 had the same tattoo done, Whitmill filed a lawsuit against Warner Brothers in 2009. The tattooist claimed his design as a copyrighted work and tried to prevent the film from being released. Nevertheless, the court rejected his motion and the parties settled the dispute out of court. It obviously did not matter to Whitmill that he had not created the motif himself but instead had borrowed it from the Maori.

The Maori have filed the copyright for their traditional face and body tattoos with the United Nations to counteract the indiscreet use of their designs."

Smartphone

Curator Claudia Augustat at Weltmuseum Wien on the smartphone in the exhibition:

“The smartphone is part of this exhibition because I consider it to be a colonial thing. It embodies global interrelations that are based on inequality. The resources used in the production of a smartphone are usually not fair-trade and are sometimes sourced in conflict regions. In our society, it has become a status symbol on the one hand and yet a disposable product on the other. Some customers get a new smartphone from their telephone company free of cost every year. Broken smartphones ultimately end up as hazardous waste on Africa’s landfills.”

The following information on the production of smartphones is found on Serlo, a free online learning platform, in 2019:

“The production of smartphones as an example of a globalised production chain: the development of a new model usually takes place in the country the company is based in. The raw materials are sourced in other countries, where payment, work and environmental standards are lower.

In South America, Africa and Asia, miners – often including children – work in hazardous conditions without any protect equipment. This practice inflicts sustained damage both to humans and nature.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, the mining of raw materials even influences the civil war, as local militias are said to finance their weapons by selling the extracted minerals.

The actual devices are usually manufactured in China or India. Most smartphones are made by

young women. Transporting raw materials and finished products across the globe leads to exhaust gas pollution, increases CO₂ emissions, and causes permanent damage to the environment.”

James Cook’s arrow

Lieutenant George Gilbert in his report on the sea voyage in 1781:

“Then a terrible silence ensued the ship for almost half an hour. It seemed to us as if we were in a dream that we refused to accept for quite a while. The pain was written in all our faces, some of us burst into tears, while others sank into deep, incredible misery. We had built all our hopes on him. He could never be replaced – a feeling that burnt itself deep into our memory, never to be forgotten.”

Claudia Augustat, curator at Weltmuseum Wien, on facts and stories around the death of James Cook:

“James Cook died in a violent conflict with warriors of the local ruler in the bay of Kealahou on Hawai‘i on 14 February 1779.

His body was allegedly treated with utmost respect in accordance with the traditions of the local population: his remains were boiled, deboned, dissected and distributed among high-ranking individuals. Parts of his dead body are said to have been returned to his crew who buried them at sea.

There are also rumours that a certain arrow at the National Museum in Sydney is made from the bones of James Cook. The arrow was a gift from a Hawaiian royal couple to a physician in London in 1884. They are said to have pointed out that the arrow had been made from Cook’s lower leg bones. How this arrow ended up in Sydney is still unclear. Neither could be determined whether the material used for the arrow is actually human bone, let alone the bones of James Cook.”

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A Colonial Thing
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Zusammengestellt von Joy Slappnig
und Claudia Augustat